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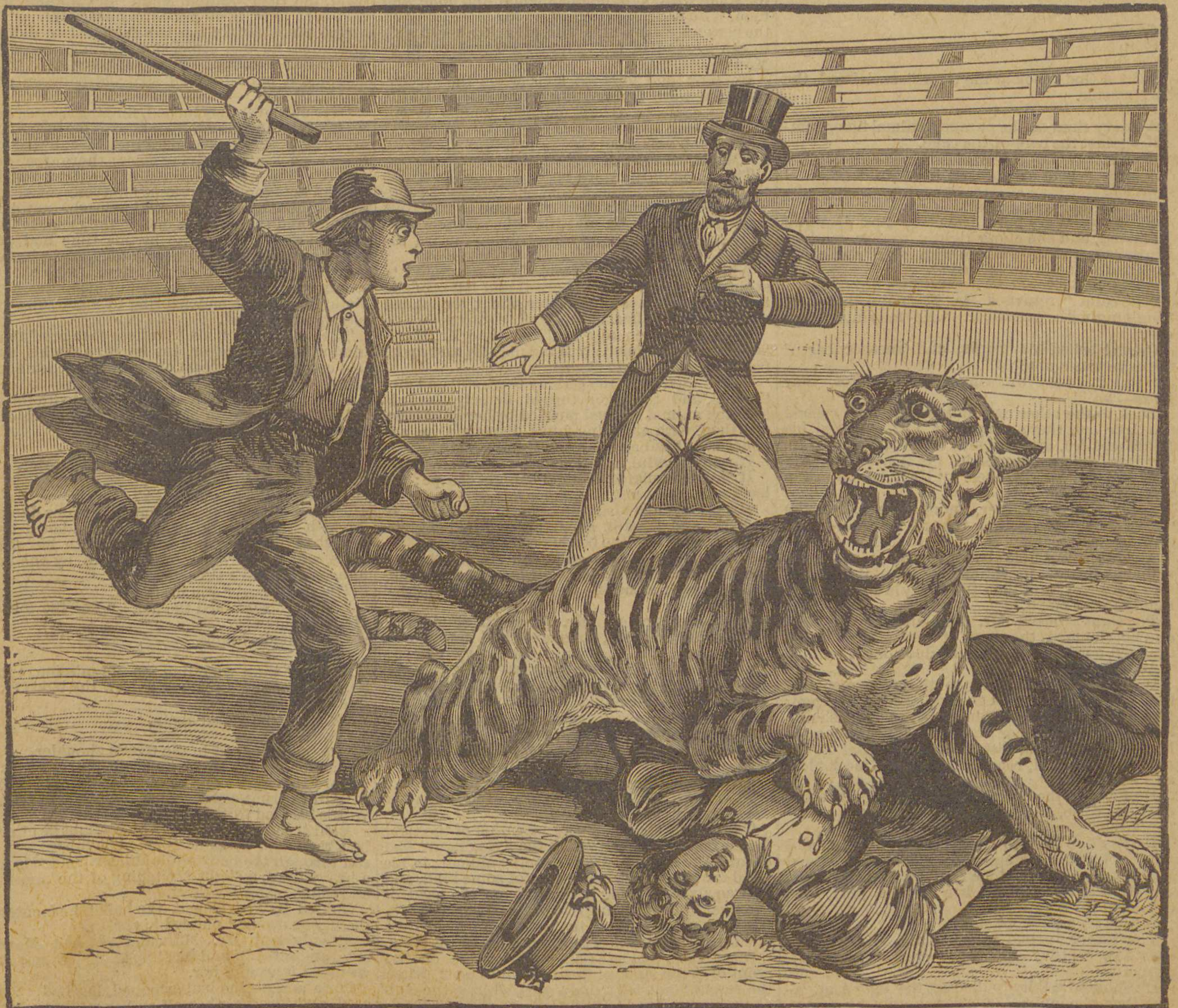
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ON DECK: or, THE BOY PILOT OF LAKE ERIE. By HOWARD DE VERE.



Then from the other side of the ring came a wild whoop, and a dark figure came upon the scene with flying leaps. The whoop drew off the attention of the tiger for an instant, during which the flying figure had cleared the space and was near the animal; in his hand the rescuer swung a club.

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ON DECK;

OR,

THE BOY PILOT OF LAKE ERIE.

By HOWARD DE VERE.

Author of "The Island of Mystery," "Satan; or, The Mystery of Ten Years," "The Moonshiners," "The Rival Boat Clubs," "Locomotive Fred," "Torpedo Tom," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

HUCKLEBERRY.

CRACK!

Snap!

Crash!

"Good God! look at the tiger!" exclaimed the ring-master.

Crack!

A heavy thud as the enraged animal flung himself against the bars of his cage.

Crash!

A bar was bent and broken in twain.

Crash!

Another bar was gone.

A frightened cry burst from the lips of Maud Marsland, and she clung tightly to her mother, whose face had grown pale with fear, and who, at Maud's clutch, exclaimed:

"Everett—Everett—what shall we do?"

"Be calm!" returned Mr. Marsland, his voice trembling with agitation. "He may not break out."

Crash! belied his words, and another bar of the cage was sundered.

"Run!" yelled the ring-master. "For your lives—run!"

Back to the other extremity of the cage rushed the tiger, and there crouching low, swayed his tail to and fro, uttering low, angry growls.

"Run, quick, get outside, for Heaven's sake!" shrieked the ring-master. "He'll be out in a minute."

Another growl, fiercer, more savage, and the tiger took a flying bound toward the more than half-formed breach.

A crash, the whole cage shook, a crackling sound as the last impediments to the tiger's liberty gave way, and then the angry brute bounded lightly to the earth.

The sight aroused Mr. Marsland into action, and he clutched the arm of his wife and half dragged her along toward the door of the tent.

And Maud!

Her gaze had wandered to the movements of the tiger before he took the spring from his cage; fascinated by the sight, dumb with terror, she released her hold of her mother, and with parted lips and frightened, distended eyes fixed on the maddened animal, remained fixed and motionless as a statue.

Half way to the entrance Mrs. Marsland recovered her voice, and sent up one wild wail.

"Maud!"

It sank like ice into Mr. Marsland's heart, and with a terrible wringing in his soul, he faced about to see his child face to face with the tiger, which, having selected her for his prey, was crouched for a spring.

It was an agonizing sight.

The father turned as white as a sheet, for he saw how terribly dangerous was Maud's position.

He shouted wildly to distract the tiger's attention, but the animal answered only by a low, menacing growl, and kept his eyes fastened on his motionless, fascinated prey.

The agonized man wildly searched his person for some weapon of defense, could find none, and then, with a desperate look on his face, flung off the nervous clasp of his wife, allowing her to sink to the ground in a faint, and essayed to go to Maud's assistance.

He took one forward step, when the green-eyed eyes were for one instant fastened on him, and he came to a halt, palsied, unable to stir hand or foot.

He could only gasp:

"Maud—Maud! Fly!"

The sound of his voice broke the spell in which the girl had been bound, and she retreated backwards several steps; then came one thunderous roar from the tiger, and his lithe and powerful body rose in the air and went flying toward the girl.

With a single cry of fear, Maud attempted to spring back, but tripped herself and fell prone to the earth, and a second later the tiger landed within a foot of her.

"God in Heaven help her!" shrieked Mr. Marsland; then exclaimed: "Maud, lie still, and make believe you are dead!"

With closed eyes, the girl lay there still and motionless, and the tiger turned fiercely towards her; the animal seemed puzzled by her quietness, and then, with gleaming fangs displayed, he advanced his head and snuffed Maud's body.

It was an awful, an agonizing moment!

If Maud simulated death she might escape; the least movement might seal her fate.

Mr. Marsland's heart stood still, he ceased to breathe, and stood in silent agony, the perspiration standing out like beads on his forehead.

Maud lay perfectly still until she felt the hot breath of the tiger against her face, and then unable to longer stand the fearful strain, she opened her eyes.

A roar of anger. Mr. Marsland shuddered, and closing his eyes, staggered and tottered in his tracks. The tiger laid one heavy paw on Maud's breast, and, snarling savagely, tore the clothing from her body; then shook his head and advanced his gleaming teeth towards the fair girl's throat.

It was terrible!

Another second and a soul would be launched into eternity!

Then from the other side of the ring came a wild whoop, and a dark figure came upon the scene with flying leaps.

The whoop drew off the attention of the tiger for an instant, during which the flying figure had cleared the space and was near the animal; in his hand the rescuer swung a club of some kind, and he was about to bring it down upon the head of the tiger, when, raising one of its powerful paws, it struck him a blow that sent him head over heels, nearly knocking the breath out of his body.

Once more the gleaming teeth were on the point of being sunk in that fair white neck, when the rescuer crawled to his knees, whirled the club above his head and brought it down with resounding force on the lowered head of the wild beast.

With a roar that shook the canvas tent from

center to circumference, with cut and bleeding head, the tiger quitted Maud and sprang with hell-born ferocity on his daring assailant.

One more stroke the lad managed to deliver, and then he was crushed to earth beneath the ponderous weight of his wild antagonist.

It was a hand-to-hand struggle between man and beast now.

Over and over they turned, flinging the sawdust up in a blinding cloud, their figures indistinguishable; so closely locked were they that all that was to be seen was a revolving mass; there arose now and then the guttural growl of the tiger, but his human antagonist was silent for a long time.

Then he uttered a shriek of pain, the rapid revolving and turning was ended, the cloud settled, and the ring-master, who by this time had procured a revolver from the side tent, saw a human figure beneath that of the tiger, which had savagely seized upon a portion of his antagonist's clothing, and was endeavoring to shake him as a terrier would a rat.

The lad, for such his beardless face proclaimed him, uttered a prayer, for he thought his time had come; and then cast one searching look about him.

He caught sight of the ring-master with the revolver, and a gleam of hope lighted up his dirt-begrimed face.

"Shoot!"

"I daren't," exclaimed the ring-master. "I might hit you!"

"Never mind me, shoot!"

The lad's speaking put him in greater danger, for with a menacing growl the maddened tiger ploughed deep into one shoulder with his sharp nails, and then drew back his lips to, by one fatal bite, end the lad's existence.

The ring-master still hesitated.

"Shoot!" screamed the lad. "For the love of Heaven, shoot!"

It was the last hope.

Crack!

A bullet went whistling on its mission, cut a gash in the tiger's scalp and drew the blood from one of the lad's ears.

"Shoot!" he yelled again.

Crack!

The bullet lodged in the tiger's shoulder. Maddened now beyond control, the tiger turned toward this new point of attack, and was flying toward the ring-master when again the heavy revolver belched forth its leaden messenger.

A shrill scream like that which might be uttered by a thousand dying demons, a convulsive tremor ran through the body while still suspended in air, a heavy thud, a slight stretching of the muscles, and the monster lay dead.

Guided by Providence, the bullet had entered the tiger's eye and pierced his brain.

Already had Mr. Marsland reached Maud's side, and already had he slipped off his coat and wrapped it around her.

For a minute she had swooned, but had recovered, and throwing herself on her mother's body, she kissed her back to life, as it were.

"My child—Maud—safe? Thank God!" and

Mrs. Marsland raised her eyes toward Heaven, while her husband, trembling with agitation and happiness, helped them to their feet and seated them on the row of broad seats running around the ring.

Then he looked toward the tiger, and then toward the spot where the desperate struggle between man and beast had taken place.

He saw the lad painfully arise, and then try to limp away.

With two or three long leaps he placed himself by the lad's side, saying:

"What, would you leave now? No; here, let me help you; is this your hat?" and stooping to pick it up, Mr. Marsland placed the article in his hand.

Mother and daughter were in a close embrace when Mr. Marsland led the reluctant lad forward. Catching a glimpse of him, Maud turned sharply around, exclaiming:

"Oh, sir, how much I owe you. You saved my life. Who is it that was so brave?" and her voice rang with enthusiasm.

The lad hung his head, and he colored as he replied.

"It was only Huckleberry, miss."

Only Huckleberry!

What a world of meaning was covered by those two words.

Only Huckleberry, the scamp of Lakeport, the boy to whose account every disappearing chicken was laid, the reputed son of drunken Sallie Wood; only Huckleberry who was called a lazy loafer, a dirty reprobate, a chicken thief, a boy to be shunned by everybody for fear of contamination, a boy who would surely reach the gallows; these were but a tithe of the hard things said about him; *only Huckleberry?*

But ah, he had now shown a courage, a soul, towering far above those of his calumniators.

To be sure no one had ever known him to work, beyond an occasional cruise with the fishermen to please a passing fancy; still, that should not have altogether condemned him.

Only Huckleberry!

That was all he was as he stood there.

Dark chestnut hair, surmounted by a dingy felt hat, without a nap or crown, rent and torn; clad in a dirty hickory shirt, a coat which might have been made for a six foot man, and nearly reached his heels, the sleeves of which were necessarily rolled up to permit the use of his hands, a pair of pants the waist of which might have gone twice around him, supported by a rope, which in turn was tightened by twisting a stick in it; the bottoms were also rolled up above his ankles, disclosing a pair of feet grimed with dirt until they were nearly black.

But when you looked into his face, when you gazed deep into the clear gray eyes, a shrewd observer might have seen in them the soul, the inner something which makes the man.

That was Huckleberry.

The ring-master approached, and clasping Huckleberry's hand, he said, with genuine feeling:

"Young man, as brave an action I never saw. You are a hero!"

"Indeed he is," warmly added Mr. Marsland. But, my lad, you are injured."

"A little," assented Huckleberry.

"I'll take you to the doctor's myself," said the gentleman. Come, Maud, come, wife," and leading Huckleberry outside, they placed him in their carriage and drove to a doctor's, where Mr. Marsland remained with Huckleberry while the coachman took Maud and her mother home.

The wounds were painful, but not necessarily serious, and were soon dressed.

"You will come again to-morrow," said the doctor.

"All right!" and Huckleberry arose.

"Wait one minute," said Mr. Marsland, and then attempted to place some money in the lad's hand.

Huckleberry's slight form was drawn up proudly, his face flushed as if he would have given a hot reply. Then he checked himself, looked appealingly at Mr. Marsland, then slowly said:

"I do not want any money for what I did. If you will settle with the doctor, that's all I want" and with figure proudly erect, he left the office.

Mr. Marsland was puzzled at the lad's conduct, and could only mutter:

"Queer fellow, that."

"Very," said the doctor. "But your girl."

"Ah, yes! go with me now to the house;" arrived at which, to Mr. Marsland's joy, they found Maud almost uninjured.

The circus had arrived at Lakeport during the night, and had put up their tent during the morning; being the leading officer of the town, Mr. Marsland had been invited to pay the menagerie a visit before the performance, and Maud, desiring to see the animals, he had accepted the invitation.

Huckleberry, like any of his ilk in country towns,

had gravitated towards the circus the first thing that morning, and had busied himself in doing chores for the circus men, in hopes of obtaining a free pass to the performance.

He had been asleep under the seats when he was awakened by the screams of Mrs. Marsland.

Springing into the open space and seeing what was up, he had caught up one of the iron pins used for the stay ropes of the tent, and this was the club he used when he sprang to the rescue.

It soon became noised abroad what had transpired, and Huckleberry was voted a hero, and with his arm in a sling, occupied a prominent position to view the performance.

CHAPTER II.

HUCKLEBERRY MAKES AN ENEMY.

MR. MARSLAND sought in vain to come into contact with Huckleberry.

He waited at the doctor's for him several days, but Huckleberry never showed up until Mr. Marsland left, and assiduously avoided meeting him, and it was only by accident that nearly three weeks after the incident recorded in our last chapter, Mr. Marsland and he met in turning a corner.

Huckleberry instantly dropped his head, and would have passed, had not Mr. Marsland taken him by the shoulder, saying:

"I'm glad to see you, my boy. You must go over to my house now, for Maud wants to see you."

He spoke in an authoritative way that Huckleberry could not gainsay, so he reluctantly accompanied the gentleman, and, all dirty and ragged, was introduced to Mr. Marsland's parlor, which, despite himself, he could not help eying in astonishment, it was so grand and so much more magnificent than anything he had ever before seen.

Presently he heard the rustle of a dress, and from the corner of his eye recognized Maud, who advanced with outstretched hand. Hanging his head, Huckleberry pretended not to see it, for he remembered how dirty his own hands were, and would not soil hers by taking it.

For a minute this apparent slight nonplused Maud, but then she said:

"Sit down, please; mamma'll be here directly. Oh! here she is now," and Mrs. Marsland at that moment entered with a kind greeting on her lips.

After a few minutes Maud said:

"Papa said that you wouldn't let him help you any, but you will me, won't you?" and she glided over, and standing beside him, placed one fair hand on his shoulder.

Could he be in his senses?

Was it possible that Maud Marsland, the daughter of the town potentate, would put her hand on the shoulder of *only Huckleberry?*

Huckleberry's gray eyes were raised until they met hers, and she saw that his were moist and filled with a mournful look.

"No, miss," in a husky voice; "I thanks you very much, indeed—indeed I does, but I don't want no money. It wouldn't do Huckleberry no good!"

Appreciating the indescribable feeling which made Huckleberry refuse the money, Maud slipped it quietly in her pocket, and resumed her seat, saying:

"You have quite recovered, haven't you?"

"Yes, miss."

"You are not sick a bit?"

"No, miss."

"How came you to be called Huckleberry?" Maud asked.

"I don't know, miss, it's a nickname."

"How old are you?"

"About eighteen, miss."

"And I'm fifteen, nearly sixteen, and I'm nearly as big as you. You're small for your age; how comes that?"

"Bad feedin' I guess, miss."

"Why," and Maud's blue, innocent eyes opened in surprise, "don't you always have enough to eat?"

"Sometimes I does, and then again very often in winter time I don't."

"How horrid; I'm so sorry for you," and the tears glistened in Maud's eyes. "Huckleberry, you *must* let me do something for you. Your clothes are all worn out; you can take clothes even if you won't money."

Huckleberry shifted uneasily in his seat; this kindness was almost killing him, and he felt that he would rather encounter twenty tigers than Maud's blue eyes.

"No, miss, I thankey—I—I—" he stammered, grew red as a rose, glanced around, as if looking for a place to escape, saw the low open window, sprang to his feet, with trembling lips, and said:

"God bless you, miss!" and leaped out of the window, just as Mr. Marsland entered the parlor.

When told of what had occurred, he laughed heartily, and then feelingly said:

"Poor fellow, he's got the spirit of a gentleman in him! I must try and do something for him somehow."

"Yes, do papa, please," said Maud, "for my sake."

"For your sake! Why, you've not fallen in love with Huckleberry, have you?" said he, railingly.

"Of course not, you goose of a papa, but then I feel so sorry for him. He says sometimes he don't get enough to eat—boo—hoo!"

"There—there—now run away," laughed Mr. Marsland. "I'll attend to Huckleberry."

But Mr. Marsland did not get face to face with Huckleberry again for some time; all that he ever saw was his long coat tails streaming behind its owner as he rapidly turned some convenient corner to avoid a meeting.

After so precipitately leaving Mr. Marsland's parlor, Huckleberry made his way towards the water, at the edge of which he lived, in a little tumble-down shanty, built of old pieces of boats and wrecks that had floated ashore.

It was a wretched looking place in every respect, and the little piece of ground stretching out behind it was rank with weeds.

Diving through the doorway, nearly knocking the door off its one remaining broken hinge, he hunted around until he found a bit of soap with which he washed his hands in the lake.

In a few minutes he surveyed them, as if astonished by the change which had taken place in their color, and then he muttered:

"They're clean now; I wish they had been there."

Had there been aroused in him a spark of self-respect?

It was several days after.

Huckleberry was wandering through the main street of Lakeport, when his attention was attracted by the shouting and hallooing of a crowd that was gradually approaching.

He waited until they came nearer, correctly surmising that the crowd of youngsters were making sport of something or somebody.

Mounting a doorstep so as to look over the heads of the crowd, he saw reeling along within it a drunken woman.

It was Sallie Wood.

His face flushed, then his eyes suddenly sparkled with anger as one of the unfortunate woman's tormenters struck her with some rotten fruit.

With a single bound Huckleberry was in the road, and with another he had reached the side of the lad who had so misused Sallie.

"Levi Griggs, you dirty hound, take that!" cried Huckleberry, and with the flat of his hand he struck young Griggs a thwack that rolled him in the dirt.

This Levi Griggs was the son of the president of the Lockport bank, was nineteen years old, a big, burly fellow, the bully of the town, fawned upon by many on account of his father's wealth and his own prowess, but secretly detested by everybody.

Griggs was on his feet in a minute, boiling with rage.

"What did you do that for?" he cried, hoarse with anger.

"To teach you some manners," said Huckleberry. "You call yourself a *gentleman*, but you're only a dirty loafer to insult a poor unfortunate woman."

"You struck me on purpose then?"

"I did."

"Then look out for your eyes!" yelled the bully, jumping forward and aiming a blow at Huckleberry.

"Look out for your own!" cried Huckleberry, warding off the blow and planting a "lifter" under Levi's peeper that sent him reeling.

Gasping for breath, Levi Griggs recovered his equilibrium, and fuming with rage made for Huckleberry once more, and once more measured his length on the ground; he was wild now, and as he sprang forward again some one cried:

"A knife—a knife; he's got a knife in his hand!"

Huckleberry caught a glimpse of it, and as Levi bounded at him he stepped hastily aside and Levi's murderous stroke passed for nothing.

Then, quick as a flash, Huckleberry's foot darted forth, Levi was tripped and fell heavily; instantly Huckleberry was upon him and wrested the coward's weapon from his grasp, after which he let him get up.

Levi's face was ablaze with passion, but he knew better than to attack his antagonist again, but shaking his fist, he cried:

"Curse you, you poor-house pauper, I'll have your heart's blood for this."

"Very well," was Huckleberry's reply, "all I wants of you is to come for it yourself."

Levi turned upon his heel, and uttering the

most foul string of sullen, vengeful oaths, he moved away.

Huckleberry stepped up to the drunken woman, who, seated in the gutter, had witnessed the fray.

"Come home," he said, and assisting her to arise, slowly led her home, his face grave and thoughtful, for he felt that for the first time in his life he had an active enemy.

* * * * *

We must run—carry the reader forward for eight months, which included the severe winter and early spring.

During the cold months Huckleberry had managed to learn the alphabet, and then had tediously advanced in learning to spell and read; he had also made some slight improvements in his dress.

It was a bright sunny day in the latter part of March.

All Lakeport was up and doing, and crowded down to the pier to see the *Antelope* start off on her first trip for the season.

Huckleberry was there, too, and was looking wistfully up toward the pilot-house as if wishing himself an inmate of it.

Charles Griggs was the owner of the steamboat, and his son, Levi, was to be captain this season; and Levi was there on the dock strutting up and down like a peacock with feathers spread.

In his vanity he forgot for one moment even his enmity toward Huckleberry, and passed him by without scowling.

It was almost time to go. Mr. Griggs was in a stew; a deck hand who had been engaged had not yet arrived.

Within ten minutes of sailing time, Griggs sighted Huckleberry, spoke to him, and in three minutes the lad was aboard, standing by the lines ready to cast loose.

The first trip was to be a sort of excursion, and among the guests invited were Mr. and Mrs. Marsland and Maud, now more womanly and sweet than ever.

Levi Griggs had a hankering after Maud, and in an endeavor to impress her with the extent of his importance, he ordered the men around like cattle, and particularly Huckleberry, whom he had now, as he thought, completely under his thumb.

It was on their return trip home that affairs reached a climax.

Huckleberry obeyed sullenly, and seeing this, Levi became more overbearing, and finally, as they made a landing, cursed Huckleberry for a stupid jackass.

The lad dropped the rope, the boat's head swung off, and ten minutes or more were lost in getting back to the dock again.

"D— you!" hissed Levi, "pick up that line!"

"I won't!" said Huckleberry, folding his arms.

"What?" screamed Levi; "dare you disobey me?"

"Yes."

Feeling that he had the power on his side, that he had the men to back him at his beck and call, Levi struck Huckleberry in the face.

"For shame!" cried a clear, silvery voice, which they both recognized as Maud's.

Quick as lightning, Huckleberry caught Levi about the waist, and flung him to the deck so heavily as to stun him for a minute; but recovering himself, and finding that his men had deserted him, Levi uttered several of the foulest oaths of revenge, and then slunk inside.

Arrived at Lakeport, Huckleberry jumped ashore, resolved never to step foot on board the *Antelope* again.

Several nights later, as he was on his way home from the village, and as he was passing a rather lonesome spot, the crack of a revolver broke the stillness, and a pistol bullet whistled through his hat.

With a cry of surprise, he turned towards the spot whence the shot had issued, and, with one panther-like bound, put himself face to face with two persons and heard the exclamation:

"The d—! missed! Knife him!"

He saw the odds were too great, and would have retreated, had he not been set upon with savage ferocity and carried to the earth. He uttered one shrill cry for help, and then commenced a struggle for life.

CHAPTER III.

THE RIVAL STEAMBOATS.

THE struggle was wild and fierce, although very short, and must have ended fatally for Huckleberry had not the pistol shot and his cry for help drawn to the scene a young fellow who had been wearily trudging along with a stick and bundle over his shoulder.

With a yell he bounded toward the spot where the scuffle was going on, and drove away Huckleberry's assailants when nearly choked by one;

the other was about to give him his eternal quietus with a dirk-knife.

"I'm much obliged to you," gasped breathless Huckleberry, as he slowly arose to his feet and confronted his rescuer. "They'd 've made short work of me but for you."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know," replied Huckleberry, but mentally he exclaimed: "Ah! Levi Griggs, you swore to have my heart's blood; it was you—I knew your voice."

"What a pity!" exclaimed the new-comer. "Such fellers like them ought to be put where the dogs couldn't bite 'em."

They reached the middle of the road, and then, after a slight hesitation, Huckleberry said:

"I don't remember your voice. You're a stranger hereabouts, I guess. Who are you?"

"I used to be known about these 'ere diggin's one't" was the return. "My name's Jemmy Dixon."

"Whose father and mother died with small-pox?"

"The same."

"I thought so. And, Jemmy, don't you remember Huckleberry?"

"I does."

"Well, I'm that kid."

"Sho', give us your hand."

"Where're you going?" finally asked Huckleberry.

"Nowheres pertickler. I'm on a tramp."

"Then go home with me."

"Done."

And off they started, nor were they molested again.

We will not relate their lengthy conversation, but will give Jemmy's story in a few words.

Leaving Lakeport after the demise of his parents, he had gone to Buffalo, where he had knocked around until finally he obtained work as fireman on a small tug-boat; which position he had retained until she accidentally blew up, maiming him; sent to a hospital, he had remained there six months; finding no possibility of getting work, he had started off on a tramp which ended by meeting Huckleberry.

He continued to remain Huckleberry's guest, and with him either roamed about Lakeport, or went fishing on the lake in Huckleberry's old flat-bottom scow.

The *Antelope* ran from Lakeport to Railroadville, at which place it was advertised to make connection with the trains, but which it rarely if ever accomplished.

As a rational result there was much dissatisfaction among those who were dependent on the *Antelope*, and all felt a thrill of joy when an opposition boat made its appearance.

"She's a beauty," exclaimed Huckleberry, enthusiastically, as the *Lake Queen* plowed through the waters of Lakeport harbor.

"That she is," said vagabond Jemmy Dixon.

But the opposition boat seemed ill-fated, for in less than a week, when in sight of Lakeport, those on board suddenly discovered that she was sinking.

They ran for shore as hard as they could go, and kept the whistle blowing as a signal of distress.

It aroused Huckleberry and Jemmy, and bounding to the door, they saw the steamer's lights glimmering through the darkness that mantled the lake.

"Something's wrong there, Jemmy," said Huckleberry. "They're in trouble; we must go out."

A couple of minutes later they were seated in the old scow, and pulling like good fellows.

They reached the *Lake Queen's* side, and Huckleberry performed twenty heroic deeds in as many minutes.

The steamer's boats could not accommodate all on board, which made the arrival of the scow most providential. Huckleberry was here, there, and everywhere, working like a Trojan, and but for his coolness and bravery many an one there must inevitably have found a watery grave; a thrilling moment was when the water, rising in the hold, rushed into the furnaces and threw up a cloud of steam that shrouded the whole boat in a cloud; a woman with a baby at her breast shrieked loudly, fell to the deck and was lost to sight in the impenetrable cloud; the officers of the boat, the deck hands, all held back.

Huckleberry alone dared go to the rescue; into the blinding steam he rushed, and the few who halted held their breath while waiting for his reappearance, which, truth to say, they never expected.

But at last he came, staggering beneath his burden.

"Is every one off?" he shouted, when his unconscious charge was lowered into the heavily-freighted scow.

"Yes."

"Then shove off, for she'll go down in a minute."

A murmur ran from lip to lip. Every boat was loaded to the gunwale; the slightest move to one side or the other would have filled the scow with water.

How was Huckleberry to get ashore?

Some one asked; he replied:

"Go ahead for God's sake! Do not stay and be swamped in the suction when the steamer goes down. I'll swim," and he plunged into the water, and seizing hold of the scow's stern to support himself, he pushed while Jemmy Dixon pulled on the oars.

A few minutes later, with a groan like a dying giant, the *Lake Queen* plunged down and out of sight.

For several days Huckleberry's exploits were on every tongue, and the grateful passengers, who owed their lives to his efforts, raised a purse of \$100, which he was forced to accept in spite of himself.

A so-called investigation as to the steamer's sinking was held, and the pilot stated that they had struck some floating object, which must have stove a hole in her hull, and this became the accepted theory.

A few weeks sped by.

"Huckleberry," said Jemmy one day, "do they intend to raise the *Lake Queen*?"

"I don't know," said Huckleberry; "I hadn't thought about it."

But Jemmy's question set him to thinking, and the next day he was a passenger on the *Antelope* to Railroadville, to see the owner of the sunken *Queen*.

Suffice it that Huckleberry left the steamboatman's presence poorer by \$75, but with a bill of sale in his pocket for the steamboat at the bottom of the lake.

"Jemmy," said he, "you and me are going to run that craft. I'm pilot and you're engineer. How are you, Chief Engineer Dixon?"

"How are you, Captain Huckleberry?" laughed Jemmy, extending his hand.

They went out to where she lay the next day, and Huckleberry being a good diver, succeeded in finding the breach, which was not a very bad one after all, although her owner and every one else had considered her very badly wrecked.

With a wise look on his face Huckleberry returned to shore.

For \$10 he hired two empty canal-boats, and \$5 more procured him the use of two long chains and two round timbers; and that night he made what is called a pitch plaster, to cover the breach.

They towed the canal-boats out and ranged one on either side of the *Queen* and parallel with her.

Then a round timber was laid lengthwise on each of the boats, and one end of the chains fastened to it; after which Huckleberry, by repeatedly diving to the bottom, managed to pass the chains under the *Queen*, fore and aft, carried the ends up and fastened them to the timber on the opposite canal-boat.

Then the pitch plaster was adjusted and they were ready to commence raising her.

By turning the timbers the chain was gradually rolled up, and the steamer, held as in a sling, was brought surfaceward. And, as she cleared the bottom, a favorable wind that blew lightly but steadily kept drifting them toward shore and shallower water.

At last they saw her smoke-stack appear, and then her pilot-house, and lastly her decks; the main-deck above water, they had recourse to pumps, and the pitch plaster holding, they soon freed her from water.

This was not, as may be imagined, the work of a day, but of more than two weeks, during which time Huckleberry never left the canal-boats, and Dixon only went on shore when it was necessary to procure food. They got her so that she would float herself, and then with his last ten dollars, Huckleberry hired the use of the shipways at the dry dock for one day; they drew her out of the water, and Huckleberry turning ship-carpenter, for he had no money to pay for the work, repaired the damage done to her hull, which, but he kept his opinion to himself, looked very little like being done in a collision.

Afloat!

Huckleberry threw up his cap, and shouted:

"Glory!"

And Jemmy added:

"Hallelujah!"

They worked night and day for a week in straightening things, and on a Friday got up steam and ran her out in the harbor a few miles and back; everything worked to perfection, and the lads were nearly wild with delight.

They wanted at least one more on board for deck-hand, and Huckleberry selected, and made happy by the selection, the son of a poor and worthy widow.

That night the following notice was posted up, being the efforts of the combined scholarship of Huckleberry and Jemmy:

"NOTIS."

"the elegant steamer *lake Queen* will leave To morrow mornin and every mornin hereafter for Railroad vil. Positiv connecting With Trains.

"fare, Same as usooal.

"Ward Wood, captain."

Jemmy, however, gave Huckleberry all the credit of this production, and admiringly said:

"Huckleberry, I'd give eenamost anything if I was sich a writer and speller as you are. The compose of it, too, is first class, and it sounds good to wind up—Ward Wood, captain. I s'pose you'll drop Huckleberry now?"

"Yes."

"If them's your orders, Captain Wood, I obeys, in course," and Jemmy touched his cap.

This notice was duplicated and posted in the public places by Jemmy, who then returned on board.

"I met young Griggs in the hotel, and he looked black'n thunder," said Jemmy; "and I thought I could hear him swear under his breath, and say somethin' about your liver, by which I s'pects he means you no good."

"Nary a bit," said Huckleberry. "Jemmy, that fellow'll work us mischief if he possibly can. We must keep a weather-eye open for 'im."

Their deck-hand was not to come on board until morning, so they determined to divide the night with two watches, Huckleberry to stay up until one o'clock, when Jemmy was to take his place.

At the hour agreed upon Huckleberry turned in, and Jemmy went out on deck, and sitting down on the rail looked out over the silent and deserted dock; the minutes dragged slowly by, and Jemmy was growing sleepy through the very monotony of the scene, when he was aroused by a metallic chink, as of two pieces of iron coming into contact.

He listened intently but could not locate the sound; a fear that it was enemies at work flashed through his mind, and was upheld by the stealthy sneaking chink, which seemed as if wishing concealment.

He hurried to the engine-room, but there found all dark and quiet; stopping to listen, the noise seemed overhead; he started up the stairs, stumbled and fell; railing at his clumsiness, which might be the means of giving the alarm, he picked himself up and was about to ascend, when a new sound brought him to a halt.

He could have sworn he heard stealthy steps on the hurricane deck.

Up he rushed, but the deck was silent and deserted; he walked around the pilot house and smoke stack, and every place which could possibly afford concealment, but could find nobody.

Much mystified, he waited until it was time to start the fires, and then called Huckleberry.

The time for starting was nearly arrived, and once more Lakeport was in excitement over the fact of a new opposition line; though many of them dared not show any preference for the *Queen* for fear of other consequences, and for a while it looked as through Huckleberry would go passengerless.

Then the tide was turned.

"Papa!" exclaimed Maud Marsland, "take me for a sail?"

And Mr. Marsland, having nothing particular to do, had consented.

Arrived at where the road branched, one fork going to the *Antelope's* pier, the other to the *Queen's*, Maud drew her father down the latter.

"Why do you want to go on the *Queen* so particularly?" asked Mr. Marsland.

"Because, papa, maybe he won't have many passengers, and—and—I always felt sorry for Huckleberry, and maybe our going would encourage him."

"Spoken like a thoughtful girl," said Mr. Marsland. "Yes, we'll go with the *Queen*."

And the smaller fry of Lakeport, as all small fry do, aped their superior, and followed him on board the *Queen*.

The bell had ceased tolling on board both boats.

A toot of the whistle, the *Antelope's* lines were in, she was heading out into the lake.

"Cast off!" cried Huckleberry, leaning out of the pilot-house window.

The lines were all in, and Huckleberry's trembling hand sought the bell-pull.

One bell.

The wheels revolved, the *Queen* moved out from the dock, and stood after the *Antelope*, now slightly ahead.

Huckleberry held his breath, and the blood ceased pulsing through his veins; Jemmy had told him of the clinking noise, and of the foot-steps; and knowing the inveterate hatred of Levi

Griggs, who would not, he knew, hesitate to do him any injury, he feared something might be wrong.

He saw Maud and her father on the lower deck, and his cheek paled, and inwardly he prayed:

"God grant nothing may go wrong while she is on board."

The wheels splashed in the water and went around, and everything was right; they ran slow across the narrow flats, but when clear of them Huckleberry rang the jingle bell, which, as most of my readers know, means go ahead at full speed.

Jemmy instantly responded, and the wheels revolved faster, and the spray danced up before the *Queen's* bow; Huckleberry's breath was returning, he began to feel safe, when a jarring, and a shivering, ran from stem to stern; slow, steady, but gaining in strength.

The returning color faded from Huckleberry's cheeks as he heard Jemmy's voice ascend:

"Something's wrong, captain—with the machinery, I think. Look at the beam."

Huckleberry glanced through the rear window of the pilot house at the beam, then started, looked sharply, uttered a cry of horror, belayed the steering-wheel, seized a hammer, jumped outside, bounded across the deck and up the stairs beside the beam timbers.

Then with a spring he landed on the walking beam, and while it went up and down—up and down, he crawled out towards its end.

Maud saw him and uttered a shrill cry of alarm. It almost unnerved Huckleberry, but he gritted his teeth, was himself again. Clutching his hammer tightly, he forgot how perilous was his situation, forgot everything save that the pin that held the beam was almost out; that beam and rod were shaking and groaning, and that should the pin come out, beam and rod must be shivered and broken and go crashing through the hull.

He reached the end at last, straightened the pin, raised his hammer to strike. The cylinder head was straining, the nuts were starting; the beam arose in the air with him. He struck. The beam descended. There came a groaning, stripping sound. He struck again. A dense cloud of steam puffed up, and he was lost to sight. Shrill screams rang from stern to stem, and all was confusion.

The beam arose again, and Huckleberry came in sight, head bare, legs wrapped around the beam, hammer raised.

The beam descended, another cloud of steam arose, and Levi Griggs, in the pilot-house of the *Antelope*, chuckled villainously, and said, with the grin of a fiend:

"I thought that would fix her; the connecting rod is broken, the cylinder has bursted, and she'll go down in less than five minutes."

CHAPTER IV.

ON TIME.

On board of the *Lake Queen* was a scene of wild excitement and confusion, for the passengers did not stop to reason, and took it for granted that the boiler had bursted, and that the boat was going to sink.

They rushed hither and thither, and some of them would more than likely have thrown themselves overboard had not Jemmy Dixon stopped the engine, and rushing out on deck, allayed the alarm.

Mr. Marsland was cool-headed, and by joining his arguments and voice to Jemmy's, they succeeded in quieting those on board.

Little Maud Marsland had been quiet, but her cheeks were pale as she kept her eyes fastened on the walking-beam.

The engine being stopped, the steam no longer escaped through the cylinder head, and the cloud that surrounded the beam floating away, disclosed Huckleberry perched high in the air, driving home the loosened pin.

Jemmy left the deck in charge of the deck-hand, and ascending to the hurricane-deck, soon learned what the trouble was, and mounting beside Huckleberry, examined the matter thoroughly, then remarked:

"That's what I heard them doing last night. They loosened the key in hopes that it would come out suddenly and smash the boat and engine all to pieces. The villains!" and Jemmy's fingers worked nervously, and he glanced ahead at the *Antelope* just rounding a point and disappearing from sight.

His face would have expressed more wrath than it did could he have seen inside of the wheel-house and heard Levi Griggs exclaim:

"They've stopped; their engine must be mashed all to blazes," finishing in a mocking tone; "good-bye, most noble *Lake Queen*! And good-bye to you, too, curse you, Huckleberry!"

And then the point of land hid the disabled boat from view.

Huckleberry raised himself a little, and then with all his strength delivered a blow on the iron pin or key.

"That's safe now, I guess," he said, gravely; "but, Jemmy, what about the other?"

"The steam that got out of the cylinder head?"

"Yes."

"Well, you see now that the rod is keyed perfect and the piston is workin' kereect, it won't escape so much. You stay here and I'll go down and give the engine a turn."

Jemmy disappeared, and shortly afterward the big wheels splashed in the water, and the beam arose and fell, accompanied by a cloud of steam.

"Well?" said Huckleberry, joining Jemmy.

"I can fix it up so's it'll do for to-day, and we can do it right to-night when we get back."

Huckleberry sighed with relief, and accompanied Jemmy when, wrench in hand, he climbed up on the cylinder head.

The threads on the bolts had been slightly started, and a single revolution more of the engines would have stripped them clean.

With the wrench Jemmy carefully tightened the nuts, thus drawing down the cylinder head, after which, to keep in the slight quantity of steam which must escape, he wrapped it about with old bagging and woolen stuff which happened to be on hand.

All this occupied about half an hour, when descending, Huckleberry's cheery voice rang from stem to stern:

"All right!"

Immediately he was button-holed by an individual, who anxiously said:

"Shall we get to Railroadville in time to catch the train?"

"Yes, sir," said Huckleberry.

"But we are half an hour behind the other boat, and it is said she doesn't connect with it half the time."

"We'll get there, sir," was the reply, in a quiet yet confident tone of voice; and then Huckleberry ascended to the pilot-house and rang the bell, gazing anxiously at the beam as he did so.

He could hear the rush of steam in the cylinder; then the buckets of the wheels churned up the water, and the *Queen* slowly forged ahead.

A small quantity of steam that would otherwise have escaped, was condensed and held back by the wrappings, but for which unsightly object, no trace of the accident remained.

The *Queen* was kept at half speed for some minutes, and then growing more confident, Huckleberry rang the jingle-bell, and then once more the spray danced high in front of the steamer's bows, and as it descended, the sun caused rainbows to dance and sparkle among the drops.

With a quiet satisfaction Huckleberry changed her course and started after the *Antelope*.

A few miles further on was a landing to make; the course here was a perfectly straight one, and Huckleberry rang a bell.

"On deck!" came the reply, and, appearing in sight, Ben Ruggles respectfully touched his cap.

"I want you in the pilot-house," said Huckleberry.

"All right!" was the reply, and honest Ben stood in the pilot-house, and his face glowed with pleasure when he was given the wheel.

"Keep her just so," said Huckleberry; "do not change her course unless I tell you." After giving which directions, he descended to the main-deck, took a glance at the fires and into the engine-room, and then walked forward, crying, "Fare!"

He saw Mr. Marsland and Maud, and the former beckoned to him.

Huckleberry approached, and the former said: "I called you, captain, as Maud said she wanted the pleasure of paying you the first fare."

"Thank you kindly, sir, for your interest," stammered poor Huckleberry, getting scarlet in the face.

"How much, captain?" said Maud.

He mumbled out the amount, and Maud put it in his hand.

"Thank you," he said, and shot away, unable to any longer encounter Maud's quizzical, laughing, yet tender eyes.

His fares collected, he returned to the pilot-house, and carried his boat up to the landing in fine style.

The plank was thrown out.

"All ashore!"

Two got off.

"All aboard!" was the next cry; but owing to the fact that Levi Griggs had said the *Queen* would not come along, all who wished to go had gone by the *Antelope*.

"Haul in! Cast off!"

One bell.

The wheels were in motion, the *Queen* moved gracefully away and was off like an arrow.

"Jemmy!" called Huckleberry, through the speaking tube.

"Ay—ay!"

"Do you think everything safe and sound?"

"I does."

"Then we must crowd on the steam, or we'll never be able to keep our promise to reach Railroadville."

"Your word is law," was the reply, and springing to the fires, he put on some coal, threw in a lot of hickory wood, and then attached the blower.

The steam jumped up at once, and Jemmy took advantage of it and opened the throttle to its fullest extent.

Oh, how they plowed the water that day, throwing it up in front and causing big waves to deluge the fire deck, and driving inside the people congregated there.

Another landing, a few got off; they had no accession to the passenger list, and then away again.

A point of land rounded, and then in the distance they saw the *Antelope*.

"Can you safely crowd her any more?" asked Huckleberry.

"Yes."

"Then give her every pound she can stand; the *Antelope's* in sight."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jemmy, and plunged into the hold and rolled out a barrel of grease. Cutting it into solid chunks, he opened the furnace doors, threw in some more wood and a quantity of fat.

It accelerated the steamer's speed, and now and then she actually forced her bow under the surface, but each time she arose gracefully as a duck, and allowed her load to run in a stream out of the scuppers and gangway.

Mr. Marsland opened the door and rushed out, crying:

"On deck!"

Huckleberry looked out.

"What are you going to do? Drown us or blow us up?"

"Neither," was Huckleberry's quiet reply.

"We are just a-goin' to overhaul the *Antelope*, sir. That's all."

Something in the lad's manner inspired Mr. Marsland with the idea that Huckleberry knew what he was about, and without another word he darted inside just in time to escape a ducking.

Minute by minute the distance between the steamers lessened, and Huckleberry even began to entertain hopes of taking the next landing away from her.

His heart was beating rapidly and his breath was coming hard and fast. In his excitement he leaned out of the window, holding the wheel steady with one hand, and kept whispering to himself:

"The *Queen's* gaining—ah—villain, the right always triumphs in the end! Faster—faster—nearer—I can see the figures on her decks—ah, they discover us—there is Levi Griggs in the pilot house—he rushes out—he sees us, stamps and shakes his fist. But we don't fear you—ha—ha! we'll beat you yet!"

The words fell thick and fast from Huckleberry's lips, but no faster than they did from Levi Griggs, who had acted in the manner indicated by Huckleberry, and who, when he shook his fist, accompanied the motion with the direst and foulest of oaths jumbled together rapidly and confusedly.

"Curse the luck," he howled. "My plans must have miscarried. May I rot in the pit of darkness if I don't accomplish my end yet!"

Then like a madman he rushed down stairs and ordered the engineer to put on more steam. But it was useless.

Slowly but surely the *Queen* overhauled the *Antelope*, and they came abreast when the landing was about a mile off.

The *Antelope* had the inside, and consequently the advantage, in the now neck and neck race, as the *Queen*, to make a landing, must cross her bow.

Choking with rage, Levi Griggs stood beside the engineer and ordered everything inflammable to be thrown in the furnaces—grease, tar, anything to make steam—then rushed madly to the pilot-house.

The passengers crowded to the upper decks and held their breath in suspense, waiting for the race to be decided.

Under the new impetus the *Antelope* held her own for a few minutes, and then inch by inch the *Queen* stuck her prow ahead; inch by inch, so slowly that it was hardly perceptible; inch by inch, slowly—very slowly, but surely; ten feet ahead, then half a boat's length, then clear water between the *Queen's* stern and the *Antelope's* bow.

Then it was that Huckleberry, unable longer to conceal his exultation, leaned from the window

and whirled his cap triumphantly about his head in full view of Griggs.

"Furies seize him!" shrieked Levi; "I'll cut out the upstart's heart!" his face was red and inflamed, and congested by the violence of his feelings; and he suddenly reeled and fell, with the blood streaming from his nose.

Huckleberry threw the wheel to starboard, and the *Queen* crossed in front of the *Antelope's* bows and reached the landing first, making the other lay to until she got off.

Here Huckleberry secured nearly all the passengers, and then put up his helm and started on the last stretch to Railroadville; they dropped the *Antelope* astern steadily after this, and arrived at Railroadville with fifteen minutes to spare.

He was on time as he promised.

The *Antelope* appeared in sight, was shoved along rapidly, but missed the train by three minutes.

At four o'clock a train came rushing in, and the passengers for along the lake shore came down to the dock, and Huckleberry obtained a fair share of the number.

At ten minutes past four both boats cast loose, but the *Queen* soon went to the front, and remained there all the way, arriving at Lakeport at eight o'clock, half an hour ahead of the *Antelope*.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

THE opposition line was now fully established, and the next day she carried as many, if not more, passengers than the "regular line," as it was called.

The amount of fares received Huckleberry religiously applied to getting the *Queen* into better condition, in supplying necessary things and correcting defects, so that in a short time she was the superior of the *Antelope* in everything.

Jemmy had a staunch and honest-hearted friend in Buffalo, who had been unlucky, and to him Jemmy wrote, offering him a berth in the *Queen*.

Dick Larkin answered the letter in person, and Huckleberry found that he fully filled the enthusiastic description of Jemmy.

"Why," said Jemmy, "that feller's shared his last crust with me many a time, an' I've seen him—true as gospel preachin'—I've seen him jest teetotally flabergast an' thrash an' walk away with blokes twice his size."

Dick Larkin was a treasure.

He entered heartily into the warfare between the rival lines, and when having boastfully cracked up the superiority of the *Queen* in public, he was afterward set upon by Sandy Quirk and Google Slinker, of the *Antelope*, and had his eyes put in mourning before he put them to flight, his very soul was in the struggle, and at a word from Huckleberry he would have boarded the *Antelope* any time for the purpose of mauling and thrashing the entire crew, Levi Griggs included.

And it was owing to Dick that time rolled by without any more *contretemps* on board the *Queen*.

He was sharp and shrewd as a weasel, and several times caught boats sneaking up beside the *Queen* under cover of night; he dropped a heavy rock in one craft, staving a hole in her bottom and leaving her two inmates floundering in the water; but they got away before he could find out who they were; on another occasion he threw a pail of hot water over three individuals who were just stealing under cover of the guards, and as they, yelling and cursing, pulled rapidly away, he called after them:

"Tell yer dirty employer to try it again; we'll give him cowl lead the next time."

During the night the boat was always guarded, Huckleberry and Jemmy being on guard until midnight, when Dick and Ben took their places.

Owing to these precautions, the evil intentions of Levi Griggs were frustrated; he fumed and fretted and chafed like an angry bull, and more than likely would have done something rash, but for his pilot, Google Slinker, who advised him thus:

"Cap'in, you knows I'm with you an' would do a'most anything to get square with that measly crowd of suckers, but nevertheless I don't want to get my neck in a sling an' dance on thin air. We must be patient; wait till they thinks we is asleep, an' then come on 'em like a clap of thunder."

And as Google would not put himself in jeopardy and Levi dared not, the "waiting" policy was adopted after the failure of the two attempts recorded.

The days became weeks, the weeks lengthened into months, and the summer passed, fall came, and cold weather set in, and there was every pros-

pect of the ice soon making it necessary for the boats to lay up.

It was a clear sunny day in November that a stranger passed through Lakeport, and stopped at the house of Charles Griggs.

Inquiring for Mr. Griggs, and being informed that he would soon be home, the stranger said he would wait, brushed past the servant, and stepped into the hall, where he was encountered by Mrs. Griggs, who, at sight of him, trembled with agitation, and turned pale as a ghost.

"How are you?" said the stranger.

To this she returned a faint, unintelligible reply, and with faltering steps hurried away.

She was a small, slight woman; she had once been beautiful, and her features were still regular, but there was always to be seen on her face a certain pained, frightened expression.

People hinted that Mr. Griggs treated her unkindly, but this was belied by their actions when seen together, for he always was kind and considerate—at least, to outward view; others said it was occasioned by worrying over the course of life adopted by Levi; while other scandal-mongers darkly insinuated that they didn't know, but it seemed to them as if Mrs. Griggs had "something on her mind," that *something* being left to the hearer's imagination to picture.

The stranger had not long to wait, for in less than ten minutes Griggs entered the parlor, and when he heard the stranger's unexpected salutation, and saw his face, he became almost as pale as had his wife.

"Ah!" said the stranger. "So happy to see me that you can't even give me a welcome, hey?" and he uttered a satirical laugh. "Glad to see me, of course?"

"Well—that is——" stammered Griggs, "I hardly expected to see you."

"No, I suppose not; the truth is, I thought our last parting would be forever; but times have gone hard with me."

"So they have with me."

"Not so bad as with me, however," said the stranger. In fact, I am compelled by necessity to ask you for a slight loan."

"How much?" groaned Griggs.

"A thousand dollars."

"I haven't got it."

"But you can get it; you *must*."

"How?"

"You're president of the bank," insinuated the stranger.

"I can't do it—I won't do it!" said Griggs, hoarsely.

"Very well. Then you have no objections to my telling what I know concerning a certain affair?"

Mr. Griggs wavered.

"Come, talk quick!" said the stranger, insolently. "I know those who would pay more than that for the knowledge."

"I would if I could," groaned the badgered man. "But my property is already too heavily mortgaged."

"Can't help that," was the cool reply; "money I want and mean to have."

Griggs' head dropped into his hand, and for a minute he was sunk in thought; and then he said, slowly:

"Very well, come to-morrow; you shall have it, but remember this—you have beggared me, and this is the last penny I shall ever give you."

"It's all I want," was the reply. "All right, I'll call again," and he sauntered jauntily out of the room, and going to the nearest hotel, engaged a room and registered himself as Henry Burton.

Charles Griggs left the house within half an hour after his visitor, and managed to raise the amount of money on his note. Much relieved at obtaining it so much more easily than he had anticipated, he returned home, entered the library, opened his safe, and was depositing it therein when his wife entered.

She saw the money in his hand and colored guiltily.

"Oh, husband!" she moaned, "more money for him?"

"Yes," was the gloomy response.

"Oh, that you had followed my advice! We might have lived happily, though poor, and our child might have been different. Oh, husband, think what Levi is—why——" and her voice sunk to a whisper as if she dreaded to hear it; he has not come home sober in a month."

This allusion to Levi rankled, and turning fiercely on his wife, he harshly said:

"Shut up, you old fool, and mind that you keep your tongue between your teeth, or I'll——" he said no more, but the murderous look he gave her caused the poor woman to shrink in alarm.

Night settled down, and Griggs sat in his study; the mother sat in her own room waiting for the return of her worthless son.

Hours dragged by, and still he came not; Mrs. Griggs was painfully awake, listening for his foot-

step, but she heard it not, nor any sound of her husband, who had dropped asleep in his chair.

Charles Griggs was aroused by a noise, and starting up saw two men in his room.

He was about to call for help when a voice said, low and stern:

"One single outcry and you'll be a dead man," and this was supplemented by the placing against his temple of the cold muzzle of a revolver.

He sank back aghast.

"D—it, you didn't give him chloroform enough!" he heard one say, and a secret pang and an awful dread racked his very soul.

He saw that the safe had been opened; that papers were scattered about, and then came unconsciousness.

When he came to all was dark and quiet.

He made no outcry, took no steps to find the robbers, but, like a man in a trance, stuffed the loose papers into the safe, and after locking it, with a groan of anguish, threw himself on the sofa, from which he arose only when breakfast was announced.

Eating this mechanically, he went to the bank, and returned only when business was done for the day.

"Levi was not home last night," said Mrs. Griggs, when he entered the house.

"I supposed as much," he replied, and then started as if shot, at sound of the door-bell; he felt as though just awaking from a nightmare.

It was Henry Burton who called.

Griggs went to the study, and opening, searched his safe, but found the money missing.

"Come to-night at nine," he said to his visitor, and left the parlor.

An hour later Griggs went to the bank, was there a few minutes and returned. Burton called at nine, and found the money ready for him.

Levi Griggs had not been home in two weeks.

Then he came one night, half drunk, and entered his father's study.

"Oh! Levi, you'll break my heart," sobbed his mother, following him in.

"Get out, you old harriidan," growled Levi; "get out, do you hear?" and he raised his hand as if to strike, then shoved her out and locked the door.

"Well?" said Mr. Griggs, that one word filled with misery.

"I want some money."

"I have none, and moreover, Levi, I should not give you anything to keep you in your riotous way of living."

"Riotous way of living! Ha, ha! my virtuous father," sneered Levi, "always avoided such a course of life as mine."

Mr. Griggs winced.

Putting on as composed and stern a look as possible, he said:

"Sir, you are a disgrace to your family, and are grieving your mother and myself to death."

"Grieving mother! Hoity—toity—you old Pharisee, I used to think so, but I know better now. It isn't her son, so much as it is her husband, whose precious neck she fears may be stretched some of these days!"

"Sir!"

"Sir!" sneered the intoxicated youth. "Sir to you—you hoary-bearded old thief. Come now, shell out!"

"Never!" shrieked Mr. Griggs. "I'll have you arrested."

"Do now," sneered Levi. "Only do, and then come and keep me company. Now, then, governor," assuming a tone of *sangfroid*, "don't let us have any more secrets between each other. We're in the same boat, and sink or swim together!"

"By Heaven! we'll sink now, if you're going to keep on as you have been going!"

"Come now, be easy on a fellow. Young Wood, curses on him, drove me to drink by his success; but I'm going to give it up now. I swear it, by Heaven! but I'm going to live for revenge now, and I want money for the purpose of—I'll speak low, so no one can hear," and he whispered into his father's ear for a few moments, then said aloud: "It's perfectly safe, and once done, I'll throttle that Burton, if he ever dares show up again!"

"But it's so horrible!" groaned Mr. Griggs.

"Bah! they won't know what hurt 'em."

CHAPTER VI.

AN AWFUL SIGHT.

GOOGLE SLINKER and Levi Griggs were in consultation several days, and then the former left the *Antelope* at Railroadville and went east on the train.

Five days later he returned, and on that same day a small wooden box was brought from the

depot and placed in the pilot-house of the *Antelope*.

"You got it all right?"

"Yes."

"Without raising any suspicions?"

"Yes."

"You made every step safe before you took another?"

"I did that, 'cause I don't want it known that I had a hand in this business any more than you do."

"Is it plenty powerful enough to do the job?"

"You bet; why, that 'ere little thing 'ud blow up the hull town of Lakeport."

"Very well," said Levi, his face a picture of savage satisfaction. "Don't let anybody but me come into the pilot-house to-day."

"All right."

And Levi was in such good humor as his men had not witnessed before in months.

When all Lakeport was asleep that night a row-boat might have been seen gliding away from the *Antelope's* side; it contained two persons, one of whom handled the oars while the other sat in the stern with a box between his feet.

The light craft shot rapidly along beneath the powerful strokes of the oarsman, until several miles had been gone over; then the oarsman rested, saying:

"I should judge this to be about the best spot. He always hugs this side of the channel in coming back at night, and the other in going out in the morning."

"Well, I leave it to you," was the low reply. "Got everything ready?"

"Yes; let's have the darling," and he took the box from the other's hands, opened it and took out a black, oblong, cigar-shaped object.

There was a ring in it to which he attached a piece of rope, the opposite end of which was fastened to a huge stone.

When all was in readiness he dropped the stone overboard, having first set afloat the cigar-shaped object.

The stone settled on the bottom, thus anchoring the latter directly in the path of the *Queen* on her return trip.

"All right?" queried a low voice.

"Yes."

"It floats right?"

"Yes."

"Then let's get back, for it won't do to be around this spot too long. We might be seen by some one."

With a last look at his work the oarsman resumed his seat, took up the oar and pulled for shore, before reaching which the moon went down, thus securely hiding them from any chance observation.

They pulled up alongside of the *Antelope*, one of them got out, the other rowed in towards the bulkhead, fastened the boat and joined his companion on board the steamer.

Night passed, morning broke.

It was steamboat time.

Levi Griggs stood at the gang-plank of the *Antelope*, giving this notice, verbally:

"The *Antelope* leaves Railroadville half an hour earlier for the rest of the season."

The passengers were all on board, the bells had ceased tolling, lines were cast off, and the rival boats headed out into the lake.

Railroadville was reached in due time, and when everything was made trim and snug, Huckleberry and Jemmy sat down outside for a quiet chat.

"What is the meaning of the *Antelope's* leaving before train time?" asked Jemmy.

"I can't make it out," said Huckleberry. "I thought maybe it meant mischief to us, but I can't see how."

"Nor I neither."

"There's something under it all, you bet."

"So there is," assented Jemmy, and then accepting an invitation from Dick Larkin to go up street and see a man, said man being the proprietor of a whisky mill, much resorted to by boatmen.

Dick stepped into a back room attached to the bar-room, and just chanced to overhear the following:

"Now, George, what's up that we leave so early?"

"So's to be home early."

"Go 'long with you! Come, now, I want no foolin'. We've been pals a long while, an' if anything's going on I want to know that 'ere something."

"Sh!" said Google. "We want to get through the Gut Channel before dark."

"Why?"

"'Cause, unless we didn't we might get—"

Dick fancied the other words of the sentence were: "Blowed higher'n a kite" but he could not have sworn to it.

"Why?" was the unending question, to which Dick made no reply.

He retreated as he heard them stir, and moving into a shady corner of the bar-room, he dropped into thought for a minute, then started up, saying, under his breath:

"I've got it."

He sent Jemmy on board alone, and showed up himself a few minutes later:

Just before the time for leaving, a ragged urchin stepped up and inquired:

"Be you the captain?"

"Yes," said Huckleberry.

"Here's summit for ye," and thrusting a dirty envelope in the captain's hand, the boy was off like a shot.

Huckleberry opened it, and on a dirty, greasy sheet of paper saw these words:

"Beware of torpedoes, and yer enemies; steer on a new course; there's mischief afloat."

Huckleberry turned it over and over, and scanned it closely, but that was all; there was no date, no heading, no signature.

Much puzzled, he stuck it in his pocket, and after they had got under way, went and showed it to Jemmy, who said:

"Well, cap, I can't 'zactly make it out, but it 'pears to me as how I'd keep both eyes open, and as this 'ere feller says, steer a new course."

They had left the last landing, and were now headed for home; the sun had long since gone down, but its place was supplied by a bright full moon.

A strange silence had settled o'er the lake; all was bathed in silver light, not a ripple disturbed the surface of the lake, naught broke the almost holy calmness but the splash of the wheels and the working of the engine.

A mile more and they would enter Gut Channel, and Lakeport would be in sight.

The wheels revolved steadily, and the *Queen* dashed the spray high before her bow.

Obedying the strange advice, Huckleberry kept the steamer to the side of the channel other than he usually did, and his keen eyes went flashing hither and thither over the smooth water as if seeking some solution of the letter.

A breeze sprang up now, and from behind a point of land a yacht came in sight, evidently standing out from Lakeport.

She was crossing in front of the *Queen*, and Huckleberry rang the bell to slow down.

The yacht passed, was a hundred and fifty feet distant, perhaps, when Huckleberry, who was watching her, heard a tremendous explosion, and then an awful sight burst upon him.

A broad sheet of flame rising upward, a huge column of water, a confused mass of sails and crushed timber, and two human beings, and then a gigantic wave came bounding toward the *Queen*, threatening to engulf her.

"Good God!" groaned Huckleberry, and jammed down the wheel.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOBLE DEED.

THE exploding of the torpedo encompassed with deadly peril all who were on board of the *Queen*; it plowed a deep hole in the water, and massed the waters high about it, and the gigantic wave that came rolling toward the *Queen's* side threatened to engulf her.

"God in his mercy help us!" was Huckleberry's prayer, as he jammed the wheel hard down so as to bring the vessel's head on to the wave.

Like an angry monster the white-capped mountain of water came bounding onward, and in a few seconds its curling, crested top hung above the *Queen's* bows; then it fell and broke with savage fury, and beneath its weight the vessel staggered and trembled like a drunken man.

Her decks were obscured from sight, and for a few awful, soul-chilling minutes it was a question of life or death.

Huckleberry's lips and teeth were shut firmly, and he hung on to the spokes of the wheel with grim desperation, hearing as if in a dream the heart-rending screams of frightened women and children, and the hoarse cries of agonized men.

Then the water poured in a flood from gangway and scupper, and the danger was past; Huckleberry breathed a sigh of relief, and was himself again, cool, calm, collected.

One bell—short—sharp—clear!

Jemmy had not deserted his post during that spell of danger and terror, and promptly responding to his captain's order, slowed down one-half.

Another bell!

Steam was shut off completely, the eccentrics were thrown out, and the working bar inserted; the wheels no longer revolved, and the *Queen* forged ahead slowly from her late impetus, and they were safe.

Had the mass of water struck her a second or two sooner on the side, it must have crushed the wheel-house like an egg-shell, and swept the deck clear; or had the young pilot been an instant slower in jamming the wheel hard down the same catastrophe might have resulted.

The waters still seethed and foamed and bubbled as the currents rushed in to fill up the vacuum, and tossing angrily about, Huckleberry saw the fragments of the ill-starred yacht.

How fared those on board of her, whom he had caught a glimpse of ere they were carried up by the terribly sudden explosion? was Huckleberry's first thought, now that their own danger was past.

He leaned from the pilot-house window, and with a cold feeling around his heart, scanned the troubled surface; a ray of hope lighted up his heart once at sight of a black object that resembled a human head bobbing up and down, but the illusion was dispelled the next minute, for he saw it was only an end of a small water-cask.

Hastily snatching his night-glass from its hook, he rushed outside, and by its aid began searching for any survivors of the victims of Levi Gregg's hellish plot.

His heart misgave him as he swept the troubled surface with its night-glass, and he thought that all must have found a watery grave, when new life was imparted to his frame, when the blood was sent once more rapidly coursing through his veins by a cry for—

"Help!"

Some one lived, that was enough.

Following the direction of the voice, it was not long before he saw a human head floating on the surface, and then saw it disappear.

"On deck!" he yelled.

"Ay—ay!" replied Dick Larkin.

"Throw life-preservers overboard, and man the boat."

"Ay—ay!" and Dick was off like a cannon-ball.

A few quick movements, Huckleberry's coat, vest, and shoes were off, and then a splash, and he was in the water, and striking out towards where had seen the head go down.

It came up again just as he reached the spot, and the poor fellow, unable to swim, drowning, bereft of reason, instantly clutched hold of Huckleberry's arms, thereby completely preventing his would-be preserver from assisting him.

Huckleberry called to him in vain; then yelled: "Let go of me; you'll drown us both!"

But the other only fastened his clutch tighter, and gripping Huckleberry in his death embrace, began slowly dragging the brave youth to a watery grave.

Huckleberry's lips became set and he gritted his teeth.

There was but one course.

With a quick, energetic wrench, he succeeded in freeing one hand, and clenching it, he struck the drowning man a powerful blow in the face, then suddenly seized him by the back of the neck and forced his head under water.

Wildly, fearfully did the man struggle, but Huckleberry, grim as an angel of death, held him there, and kept him there by getting above him.

A splash in the water informed him that the boat was let down; he heard the oars thrown in, and then heard the oarsman give way.

"Quick!" gasped Huckleberry, who was almost played out.

"Ay, ay!" returned Dick Larkin, and he fairly made the little craft fly across the intervening space.

Huckleberry held on to the man he had attempted to save, whose struggles, growing weaker and weaker, had now ceased.

Dick was beside him, and he raised the inanimate figure to the surface, and bade the deck-hand drag it into the boat, after which he clambered in himself.

"Pull around, Dick," he said, as he coolly seated himself.

Dick obeyed, and Huckleberry kept a sharp look-out; it took only a short time to convince him that any one else who might have been on board of the yacht was by this time beyond human aid.

"It's no use, Dick," he sadly said, "further search is useless; let us return."

Dick pulled briskly back, and the inanimate figure was tenderly lifted on board the *Queen*. Dick and the young pilot clambered on her deck, the latter being instantly seized by the hand in such a warm and hearty grasp as made him wince.

"God bless you, captain! That was a noble deed."

And those who crowded the deck, still wet and slippery, echoed the first speaker's honest, bluff remark.

And with the memory of their own recently-passed danger, from which Huckleberry's prompt action saved them, still in their minds, they

would have given him three rousing cheers had it not been for the sight of the inanimate figure stretched on the deck, the cold water dripping from the clothing and running in little rivulets down the deck.

Death is always terrible to look upon, but more particularly so when drowning has been its cause; the wet body, the skin as seen through the watery film over it, suggestive of decay, and like the dark mold on decomposing animal tissue; the tossed and matted hair, the swelled body and bloated face.

Add to this the flickering gleam of a steamer's lamp, playing with ghastly effect on the man's features, and you have the scene on the fore-deck of the *Queen*.

Instinctively the more timid shrank away, but Huckleberry found one or two who were courageous enough to assist in carrying the body inside.

Dick by this time had hauled the small boat up; Huckleberry sent him to the pilot-house to take the steamer in, which mission Dick started to perform with face aglow with pride and pleasure.

Then under Huckleberry's directions, efforts were made towards resuscitating the rescued man; for some time the result was more than doubtful, and the tired workers would have given up had not Huckleberry discovered a new feeling of warmth in the cold body, which, being told, served to stimulate them anew in their humane efforts.

In a very few minutes it became certain that their effort had not been a vain one, for after the young pilot had administered a tablespoonful or two of brandy, they could see him faintly breathing, and at once he was removed to Huckleberry's state-room, and rubbed dry and covered up warmly in his bed.

Huckleberry changed his wet garments for dry ones, and leaving the stranger for a few moments, made his way into the engine-room just in time to hear Dick call down to Jemmy through the speaking-tube:

"Tell the captain there's some small boats puttin' out from Lakeport; they must-a-heard the explosion."

Huckleberry answered at once:

"When you get near them slow up, and tell them it's useless to go any further."

"Ay—ay, sir," returned Dick, recognizing the voice as that of his captain, and then returned his attention towards the small boats which they were fast approaching, and in the first of which sat the two arch conspirators—Levi Griggs and George Slinker.

They were in an exultant frame of mind over the supposed rapid success of their ingenious and devilish plot for accomplishing a double purpose—the destruction of Huckleberry and the rival steamer.

When Lakeport was reached that night, Levi had ordered the fires hauled at once, for in the contingency of an explosion he did not wish to take the *Antelope* to the rescue, as would be necessary if he had a head of steam on.

So, this done, he and Slinker sat in the gathering darkness on the fore-deck, talking in low tones, occasionally pausing to listen or cast a glance in the growing gloom toward Gut Channel.

Suddenly a low, booming sound, a sort of dull roar, rumbled in their ears; instantly on their feet, they saw a bright column of mingled smoke and flame, and then all became quiet.

A guilty look crept into Levi's face, but was chased away by another of fiendish, gleeful satisfaction, and he joyfully exclaimed:

"It's done, Slinker!"

"That am a fact. We're the only boat what leaves this port to-morrow mornin'," he said, grimly, and then called Levi's attention to the people who were hurrying down to the wharf from the village, where the low, sullen report had been distinctly heard, sounding like the bursting of a boiler.

"What has happened? Does anybody know?"

This was the question that trembled on, and fell from many a lip, but no response was offered to either question until Levi Griggs appeared, when, coached by Slinker, he insinuated that it might be that the *Queen's* boiler had exploded; the rumor spread like wildfire, and in two minutes this was taken as an accepted fact; seeing which, Levi Griggs, although believing Huckleberry dead, could not forbear venting his malice and spleen by frequently saying:

"That's what comes of entrusting two dirty whelps of imps with a steamboat."

"Attention!" suddenly rang out a voice, that of Mr. Marsland, who had just reached the spot and heard the awful tale; for a moment the noise ceased. "Small boats!" he exclaimed; "we must man them, and in God's name see what we can do for the poor unfortunates."

He ceased speaking, the bustle and confusion increased ten-fold for a few minutes, and then nearly a dozen small boats went skimming over the lake toward Gut Channel, and at the head of the little fleet was the slight and easy pulling chicken-boat belonging to the *Antelope*, and containing Slinker and Levi, the former pulling at the oars, the latter seated in the stern.

"It's a good dodge, gettin' there first," chuckled Slinker, with the grim humor of a devil incarnate. "It 'pears so anxious-like and human," and he drew down the corners of his mouth, and wondered whether his expression was that of a long-visaged saint.

Suddenly Levi stood bolt upright and a look of alarm crossed his face.

"What's the row now?" demanded Slinker.

"Look there."

Slinker turned and plainly saw a steamer's lights, the first glance of which had fairly frozen the marrow in Levi's bones.

It was the *Queen*; there was no doubt of it, and Levi trembled with terror lest now his crime should find him out, and his fears took expression in frightened exclamations which were only silenced when Slinker savagely exclaimed:

"D—n you—you fool! Stop your whining or they'll hear you in the other boats; stop, or I'll slug you."

He pulled no further, but laid on his oars, and in a few minutes he and all the rest of the party who had started to the rescue heard Dick's cheery voice sing out:

"It's all right; pull in shore again."

The *Queen* reached the pier and was tied fast some time before the small boats got back; and the steamer's passengers had time to tell the story of the accident.

Mr. Marsland heard it with paling face, then rushing on board, exclaiming:

"Show him to me! My God! keep me no longer in suspense!"

Huckleberry led him to the berth where the rescued man lay.

"Saved! Our Father, which art in Heaven, I thank Thee!"

It was Mr. Marsland's brother.

He recovered his senses after awhile, and was removed to Mr. Marsland's house.

The affair was a mystery to everybody, excepting, perhaps, two people, and they, of course, would say nothing about it.

People tried to solve the riddle, but the only solution offered was that the yacht must have had a keg of gunpowder on board, although the owner of it declared he knew of no such thing; but people said to this: "But both of your men were drowned and they might have known of it."

Levi Griggs trembled in his shoes for the first few days after that night, but grew more confident as he heard of no suspicion directed against himself; for Huckleberry would not say anything about the strange message he had received, preferring to keep it to himself, with the intention of trying to ferret out the mystery by its aid.

All danger to himself being past, Levi Griggs began to curse his ill-luck, and, instead of being prevented by it from any further murderous attempts upon his rival, it seemed to egg him on until he fairly gnashed his teeth with rage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MURDEROUS PLOT.

MR. MARSLAND boarded the *Queen* one evening about a week after the explosion, and invited Huckleberry to go and spend the evening at his house.

Huckleberry evidently disliked the idea, and turned red as a beet when he thought of his last visit there, and of his inglorious exit.

But the gentleman would not take no for an answer, and Huckleberry spruced up a little, and went with him. He was received by Mrs. Marsland, Maud, and the man whose life he had saved, and who was just barely recovered from the effects of his strangulation in the water.

"I'm glad to see you so well, sir," said poor Huckleberry, feeling unable to say anything else.

"Captain," said he, "I owe you very—very much; but for you I would not have been here now."

"I was sorry I had to treat you so roughly," stammered Huckleberry.

"No," was the reply, "no apology is necessary. I thought then you was a fiend, but now I see that the only salvation for us both was to suffocate me into quietness. I still bear the marks of your blow on my face, but it saved my life, and I can assure you I owe you no grudge."

"It was the only way, sir."

"I know it."

Then followed quite a lengthy conversation, in which both gentlemen earnestly joined in trying

to persuade Huckleberry to accept some favor at their hands; to all of which they received a quiet, but manly and decided negative reply.

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Marsland at last. "Perhaps you are right in not accepting any favors as long as you can get along without them. But will you promise to come to me if any trouble ever overtakes you?"

"I will," said Huckleberry.

Then there was some singing and some small talk, and Huckleberry enjoyed himself, he hardly knew how, it was so much like a dream.

How he got his hat and reached the piazza he never knew; he vaguely remembered a warm pressure of the hand by the gentlemen, then of feeling Mrs. Marsland's hand within his own; then of involuntarily glancing downward at his own hand—clean this time—and of having Maud's tiny, soft, tender fingers within his grasp for a few seconds; he never got out of dreamland until he stepped on board of the *Queen*, and then he found that he had been carrying his right hand extended, and flushed guiltily, and called himself a fool when he remembered that he had done this to preserve it from contact with anything gross, it having been sanctified, as it were, by her touch.

He called himself a donkey and other hard names, and determined to drive away the foolish thoughts that crowded his brain.

This, however, was not so easily accomplished, and his sleeping thoughts were not far removed from his waking ones; and when, on jumping out of bed the next morning, he remembered the nature of his dreams, he could not help turning very red, and shrunk within himself as he thought of the promise he had made to call again on the Marslands.

Business with him was at its best now, for the *Antelope* leaving Railroadville so early, threw into Huckleberry's hands all the traffic of the east train.

And Levi Griggs, when he saw how he had played into his rival's hands, was beside himself with rage, and but for the coward fear that rankled in his bosom of directing public attention too closely toward him, he would have changed the *Antelope's* time-table again; not daring to do this, every day he ran he lost money, while Huckleberry proportionately gained patronage and profit.

Levi should have been thankful that he had been spared the awful crime of murder, but instead, now that Huckleberry was safe, he maligned the young pilot to everybody who would listen to him, and by day and night schemed and planned for his destruction.

During the few succeeding weeks Huckleberry went serenely on his way, knowing nothing of the daily-formed schemes against his life; the only difference he made was in being more watchful of himself when business called him to the village after dark, and in ordering the boys to keep a keener lookout during the night when on watch, for he well knew that the destruction of the *Queen* would be a fatal blow to him and his hopes.

About this time the poor-house foundling exhibited his largeness of heart toward Sally Wood.

The old woman had promised some time before to give up drinking, and had succeeded very well, though Huckleberry had caught her once or twice the worse for liquor; he visited her one night and found that she had been drinking; then he upbraided her in the strongest terms, and the penitent woman, going down on her knees, called Heaven to hear her vow to abstain henceforth from the intoxicating cup.

Something in her manner made Huckleberry feel that she could be trusted, and taking her by the hand, he led her from the old hut to a little cottage in the village.

"This is for you," he said.

The poor woman shed tears of gladness, and for some minutes was so overcome as to be unable to speak; then she gasped:

"For me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Huckleberry, you're too kind to an old wretch like me."

"No," he said, gravely. "Sally, you were a lady once. Be one again."

"I will!" she exclaimed; "for your sake if not my own," and shortly afterward the young pilot returned on board.

One Saturday night it turned off quite cold, and the ice commenced forming, and made all day Sunday; on Monday morning the *Antelope* made no preparation for leaving, but Huckleberry, as usual, got up steam.

"Will you carry the mail?" he was asked.

"Yes; and will take it as long as I can crowd the *Queen* through," was Huckleberry's proud reply, feeling the importance he acquired in having the mail intrusted to him.

For several days he made time as usual, the thin ice in the bay forming no serious obstacle to the *Queen's* progress; then the weather took a

sudden change, and became piercing cold one day late in the afternoon, and people prophesied that the steamer would be unable to leave Lakeport in the morning.

Levi Griggs and Slinker had been in close consultation all that day, and when this phase of circumstances forced itself on Levi's notice as he and his fitting associate sat on board the *Antelope* that evening, he could not forbear a round of oaths.

"The devil!" he growled. "If she don't go in the morning our plan is knocked into a cocked hat. D—the luck, anyhow!"

He was up betimes the next morning, and hurried down to the pier and on board the *Antelope*; the *Queen* was getting up steam.

"She's going!" he exclaimed, exultingly. "Now, Google, is your chance to make that thousand. 'You'll go, won't you?'"

"I reckon so."

An evil smile flitted across Levi's face as already in imagination he saw his rival's body, cold in death, before him.

After some further low conversation Slinker crossed over to the pier, and boarded the *Queen*, finding himself one of scarce a half dozen passengers, none others having the courage to brave the dangers of the journey to Railroadville through the ice.

In fact, a few sporting characters offered odds that the *Queen* would not reach her destination, and found no takers of the wager.

Sharp on time the steamer forged her way from the dock out into the lake; the ice was heavy just here, but Huckleberry knew that it would be thinner further out, and possibly they might find clear water outside the bay.

Jemmy was the first to notice Slinker, and he muttered to himself:

"You dirty faced villain; I'm afraid your being on board bodes us no good!" and then through the tube he informed Huckleberry, who sent back the message:

"Tell Dick to keep his eye on him."

The ice proved heavier than Huckleberry had expected, and they were an hour late in reaching Railroadville, where he announced this as the last trip of the season.

He wished himself, even then, safely back in Lakeport, for he expected a hard tug of it on the return trip; promptly on time the lines were cast off, and the home trip commenced; there were even fewer passengers on board now than there had been that morning, for those more timid had determined to make the long journey by stage rather than risk their lives.

Slinker was not among the missing, however, for he had a purpose in being on board.

The *Queen* went slowly crunching and grinding on her way through the ice; she trembled from stem to stern as if in agony, and the steam seemed to exhaust more forcibly and noisily than usual, while the paddles, as they smashed the ice, and rattled small pieces around in the wheel-houses, made an almost infernal noise.

It was pitch dark ere they were half way to Lakeport.

Huckleberry was in the pilot-house, his hands on the wheel, his eyes studying the compass, and now and then looking long and earnestly in the gloom ahead; while standing thus on one occasion he was nearly thrown from his feet by a heavy jar, and the sudden stoppage of the steamer, whose every bolt and timber strained and squeaked; Huckleberry's hand was on the bell-pull, when he heard a crack, and the *Queen* forged slowly ahead through the open seam in the heavy cake they had struck.

The few passengers either gathered around the hot stove, or paced restlessly to and fro on the main deck, nervous and excited; the upper saloon was deserted save for the presence of Google Slinker, who had stolen up there unobserved.

"Shall I or shan't I?" he queried. "It's a dangerous thing—but—hum, a thousand dollars don't grow on every bush. We're just grindin' through a big field of ice that stretches clean in shore, and that makes escape sure if I needs take to my legs. A thou——" He leaped to his feet. "I'll do it!"

Huckleberry, intent upon his work, did not see a dark figure emerge on the hurricane deck; did not see it stealthily creeping toward the pilot-house; nor did he see the murderous dirk, whose brightly polished blade glinted even in that dense darkness.

Another shock, another shiver of timberhead and keelson, as the *Queen* struck another heavy floe.

"Keep her steady!" he called to Jemmy.

"Steady it is," came back the reply, as Huckleberry threw open the door to get a better view of his surroundings than the dimmed glass would allow.

Leaving it open he bent to the tube, intending

to again speak to Jemmy, but no word issued from his lips, for Slinker, ever ready to seize an advantage, no sooner saw the open door, then placing the murderous-looking knife between his teeth, he brought out an equally murderous slung-shot, stepped lightly and quickly forward, and through the door with his weapon upraised.

Huckleberry heard the light footfall, and one transitory glance showed him that it was an enemy; a glimpse of the slung-shot warned him of danger, and a cry was upon his lips, when the villain, quick as lightning, gave him a swift, sure blow, and the young pilot sank down like lead, never as much as a groan issuing from his lips.

A hoarse laugh gurgled in Slinker's throat, a laugh of savage glee and satisfaction, and he muttered:

"A neat knock down, by——! Fixed him in the first lick! But it's best to make sure about these 'ere matters!"

He stopped down beside the prostrate body and ran his fingers along Huckleberry's head, and he fairly gloated as he felt the tangled, matted mass of blood-soaked hair, and ran his finger tips along the gaping mouth of a cruel gash.

Then he coolly cleaned the blood and hair from his slung-shot, and concealed it about his person, after which he quietly but rapidly sought to find out if any life still remained in the warm, quivering body.

"He's deader'n a salted codfish!" muttered Slinker. "But it's best to make sure—best to make sure!"

Huckleberry had fallen on his face; as coolly and calmly as though handling a piece of pork or a log of wood, Slinker rolled him over on his back, deliberately raised an interposing arm that had fallen across Huckleberry's breast, clutched the left firmly, took deliberate aim, and plunged in the blade clear up to the handle; a stream of blood gushed forth when he withdrew it as he arose to his feet; tossing the knife overboard, he retreated, chuckling like a fiend.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER DASTARDLY SCHEME.

"THERE'S a thousand dollars easy made," grinned Slinker, as he slunk from the hurricane deck to the saloon, and thence to the main deck; arrived here he fastened himself at once on Jemmy Dixon's notice.

"This racks an engine awfully, don't it?" he remarked, leaning across the breast-high door of the engine-room.

"Yes," was the reply, in a short, surly tone, for Jemmy had a thorough contempt and dislike for Slinker, and did not care to enter into conversation with him.

Slinker persisting, Jemmy gave him an open rebuff; this the villain pretended not to notice or understand, and stuck there under Jemmy's nose like a leech.

Knowing that sooner or later the murder must be discovered, he knew it would be a wise move to be able to account for as much of his time as possible.

More than half an hour slipped away, when once more they were brought up all standing, as the phrase goes, by striking heavy ice again; Jemmy's hand jumped to the bar and steam valve, ready for orders, should any come; but none came, though the steamer was laboring heavily, but finally the engineer thought it advisable to call through the tube; but to his surprise no answer came back; a suspicion of evil flashed into his mind, and leaning over the door, he called:

"Something's wrong in the pilot house. Go up, Dick."

Dick had stepped out on the fore-deck, but Ben Ruggles responded and darted up-stairs with the speed of a greyhound; the wind blew in wild, piercing gusts, but he rushed along on the hurricane deck, reached the pilot house, and gazed in through the open door; the first object he saw was the dim outline of a prostrate body, beside which he fell on his knees; with a shrill cry of horror he drew back; the hand he had placed on the young pilot's breast was covered with thickened blood; trembling, he knelt there, dazed and stupefied, unable to move hand or foot.

The lethargy was only broken when he heard Jemmy's clear, sharp voice come up through the tube:

"What's the matter?"

"Murder!" gasped Ben. "The captain's dead!"

These were the thrilling words heard by Jemmy, Dick Larkin, who had returned from outside, and Google Slinker.

A wild cry burst from Dick and he bounded away with long strides, while Jemmy leaped to the valve, cut off the steam, and then flung himself with tiger-like ferocity on Google Slinker, who forthwith yelled for help; the passengers

rushed to the scene and tore Jemmy off and flung him away, panting, maddened, savage.

"What's the matter?"

"The captain," gasped Jemmy, "murdered! Let me alone, gentlemen; Slinker, I'll not lose sight of you; come!" and seizing him by the collar, he started up-stairs to the saloon, as they emerged into which they saw a fierce struggle going on between Dick Larkin and a stranger.

"You whelp of hell!" screamed Dick, and suddenly flooring his antagonist, he seized him by the hair, and commenced pounding his head on the floor so fiercely, that those who looked on, spell-bound, expected to see the man's skull broken, and his brains scattered around.

With a yell of rage and pain, the burly fellow twisted from under Dick, gave him a staggering blow in the face, and the next minute was on his feet, rushing away.

With a savage cry, Dick sprang in into his state-room, the door of which stood open, and the next instant was in the saloon again with a revolver in his hand, and took a shot at his flying antagonist. The fugitive gained the door, opened it, and jumped outside, a bullet whizzing close by his head; Dick bounded after him, reached the door as the other, with a wild yell, leaped from the deck and doubled up, groaning, on the ice.

Crack—crack!

It gave him new life; he scrambled to his feet and limped away in the darkness; in an instant Dick jumped after him, landing all in a heap, and stunned somewhat; leaping hastily to his feet, he rushed after the fugitive, who was made plainly visible by the light of the just risen moon.

Dick gritted his teeth savagely as he ran, and when, gaining rapidly, he was near the flying man, he brought his revolver to bear, crying fiercely:

"Halt, you villain, halt! stop where you are or the bead I've got on you will be your death!"

On—on, the fugitive sped, making no reply.

Crack!

As the report rang out Dick's feet went from beneath him, and he fell headlong.

By the time he was on his feet his antagonist was far in shore, and to Dick's disgust disappeared in the woods before he could get a chance for another shot; and so, disappointed in his pursuit, he made his way back to the boat.

Meanwhile Jemmy and the passengers, to all of whom, Slinker included, the stranger's presence had been a surprise, had gone up-stairs to the pilot-house; the binnacle light was uncovered, and all the horrible details of the ghastly scene were made visible.

A great sob welled up from Jemmy's heart, and he sank beside the body moaning:

"Dead—dead—dead!"

With moistening eyes the passengers looked upon what was passing, and would not break in upon Jemmy's honest anguish; he crouched beside the body, rocking to and fro, and wailing over the young pilot's untimely fate.

A tramp of hurrying feet along the deck, and Dick was among them.

"Curses on the murdering devil!" he hissed. "He escaped me in the darkness, but if the captain is dead, curse him again, I'll hunt him down and have his heart's blood. Jemmy, my boy, arouse yourself; let's see if he's dead."

Slinker heard Dick's accusation, and exulted in secret, for he saw that to the unfortunate stranger was imputed his own horrible crime.

"Let me see him!" cried one of the passengers, now that Jemmy was aroused.

A minute or two of examination and then Huckleberry was taken down-stairs, and the self-elected physician, who evidently had some skill, went to work; the boat was forgotten and lay motionless in the ice, the engine was still, and rising steam blew off unheeded through the safety valve.

Half an hour passed; the gentleman faced the anxious-faced party.

"Well?" exclaimed Jemmy, in a husky voice.

"He still lives."

"Thank God!"

"The devil!" gasped Slinker; "a thousand dollars gone to the devil!" and then cast a terror-stricken look around to see if he had been overheard; but each was too engrossed to notice him, and the villain breathed freely again.

"But," continued the gentleman, "he is very low, and without immediate proper medical aid will die before morning."

"Medical aid he shall have then!" cried Jemmy. "Dick, take the wheel," and dragging Slinker with him he hastened to the engine room, flung the villain into a seat in one corner; raking the fires and weighting the safety-valve, he soon got on a tremendous head of steam and shoved the *Queen* so that every timber threatened to separate from its neighbor.

Huckleberry was slowly but surely sinking,

and when the boat lay at the pier at Lakeport and the doctor came, he would give no hope at all.

In twenty-four hours anxious Jemmy got this much comforting news:

"There was a bare chance. He *might* live."

It was a tough pull, but careful nursing carried Huckleberry through, though it was more than a month ere he stepped on deck.

Levi Griggs and Slinker were crazy with rage at the miscarriage of their plans, and with the pertinacity of demons, resolved not to be balked of their prey although they had failed this time; Slinker was sour as could be, and demanded at least half pay for the risk he had run, and Levi went to his father for it, for Slinker had said:

"You must get it. You have some particular reason for his death which I don't know, and if you don't get the money I'll never raise my hand again."

"I haven't a cent, Levi," said his father when he asked.

"Get it, then."

"I can't."

"You can—at the bank if no other way," was the significant rejoinder of the young villain.

Mr. Griggs made no reply except a groan, but the next day the money was placed in Levi's hands.

It was a gala day to Dick and Jemmy, for Huckleberry was going on shore for the first time; that afternoon they went with him to the village and had tea with him at Sally Wood's; after which they returned to the boat, while Huckleberry wended his way to Mr. Marsland's.

He started violently, when entering the parlor, he found himself face to face with his arch enemy, Levi Griggs.

"Good-evening," said Maud. "Pray be seated. I believe you gentlemen are acquainted?"

"I have not the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance," said Levi, maliciously; Huckleberry colored under the mean cut, and Maud was embarrassed, but recovering quickly, went through the form of introduction.

As a recompense for the slight he had suffered in her house, Maud paid particular attention to Huckleberry, which tantalized and tortured Levi until he was ready to foam at the mouth, and it was all he could do to maintain the sullen silence he had first wrapped himself in.

Feeling constrained, Huckleberry did not stay long; Maud accompanied him to the door, which mark of special favor was wormwood and gall to Levi, who, when she returned, hotly exclaimed:

"How can you tolerate that poor-house pauper?"

"I tolerate in this house only gentlemen! When you learn to be one you may call again. At the present time, you can—go!"

There was no mistaking the meaning, and Levi sullenly obeyed, and chafing like a caged tiger, left the house, with another incentive toward sweeping into the grave the young pilot of Lake Erie.

Day by day Huckleberry grew stronger, and now began to spend nearly all his evenings in the village.

In returning he saved distance by a short cut across the ice, which, being noticed by Slinker, was communicated to Levi, who, burning for revenge, listened eagerly, and between them they concocted another dastardly project.

Huckleberry left the village one dark night, and taking his usual course, started across the ice in a brown study.

Suddenly he felt himself falling and tried to save himself, but too late; the next instant he plunged headlong into the chilling water through a hole in the ice.

He uttered a shriek as he fell and fancied he heard a cry of fiendish joy; then down into the water, missing his clutch at the surrounding ice; down—down, and then up, but—good God! not to the surface; he arose only as far as the under side of the ice, and then was swept away by the current.

"He's fixed safe enough this time, Google," remarked a distant watcher of the scene. "They say the third time is always sure!"

Would it prove so?

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE ICE.

So much a part of the life of Levi Griggs did his resentment and anger toward Huckleberry become, that he scarcely knew a waking or sleeping minute in which his mind was not plotting some means of vengeance.

Google Slinker, for his own ends, fanned this flame of passion, and one night he said:

"Levi, have you made up with Maud yet?" although he knew better when he asked the question, which in reality was to be used in adroitly introducing something else.

"No," growled Levi, "I haven't seen her since she ordered me out of doors for calling that thief a poor-house brat, curse her and him too."

"So says this individual," snarled Slinker, who had never forgiven Huckleberry for returning to life after he had left him for dead; which fact so angered him that he called Huckleberry a thief, inasmuch as by not consenting to die he had robbed him of two thousand dollars."

"I saw him going up there again last night," said Levi, moodily.

"Looks as if he was agoin' to cut you out," said Slinker, craftily working up Levi into a passion. "He seems to get the best of you on all sides."

"You lie, you dog," hissed Levi, and his eyes glared, and he made a movement as if about to attack his companion; then overcome by his rage he sank back in a chair and became pale as a ghost.

Every once in a while Levi was attacked with just such a paroxysm of rage, and more than once Slinker had feared he would burst a blood-vessel during the first transports of his rage, which, having passed, would leave him weak and limp, but with a mind fitted for any devilish work.

He was just where Slinker wanted him and the villain said:

"I've got a plan, Levi, to put him out of the way."

"Impossible!" said Levi, surlily. "I believe the fellow bears a charmed life."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, why haven't we succeeded then? A revolver I never miss with, went wide of the mark; the torpedo he escaped; you crushed his skull and put a knife in him, yet he comes up smiling again. That's three times it's been tried and failed, and if the third time fails they say it's no good trying again."

"But it ain't three times, for you can hardly count the torpedo as one, for he didn't run into it. The third time won't fail."

"Why not?"

"The plan's too sure."

"What is it?"

"That'd be tellin'," said Slinker, in a knowing way. "How much is it worth to get rid of him once for all?"

"I hain't got any money," was the gloomy response.

"I'll make an offer; say five hundred dollars; I know you can get that much."

"It's a bargain," replied Levi, after a moment's brooding silence; "what is your plan?"

Slinker unfolded it, and it was satisfactory to Levi, who soon after arose to leave the *Antelope*, on board of which Slinker had his winter quarters.

"To-morrow night, then!"

"Yes."

"I'll be here at nine."

"I'll be waitin' for you," receiving which answer, Levi went home, and with a brighter face than he had worn for some time, entered his father's study.

The conversation drifted to Maud Marsland.

"Levi," said Mr. Griggs, his brow clouding darkly, "you must do something in that quarter; unless you can marry Maud, and get hold of some of the old man's cash, I'm afraid things must go to the devil before long."

"What can I do?"

"There's only one way that I see; write her an apology."

"Crawl to her feet like a whipped cur, you mean," sneered Levi.

"Once married, Levi, you can exact satisfaction for everything."

"Yes, and by—I will!"

"There's only one thing I'm afraid of, which is that that pauper hound may carry off the prize before you."

"Never fear for him," said Levi, in meaning tones.

"What—how so?"

"He'll not trouble us after to-morrow night."

"Why not?"

"Wait and see."

"And the apology?" queried Mr. Griggs.

"I'll write one," grumbled Levi, "as I see no other way;" and sitting down, he ground out a few words of apology and explanation, for every one of which he mentally swore to wreak satisfaction when once she was in his power.

This was dispatched the next morning, it being Tuesday. The same day he received a short reply, saying that she would be home on Wednesday evening.

At nine o'clock on Tuesday evening, Levi Griggs sneaked on board the *Antelope* like a criminal.

He found Slinker ready. The villain shouldered an axe, an ice saw, and an ice-hook.

"He went to the village?" said Levi.

"Yes."

"You saw him?"

"Yes."

In silence they stepped on the ice, and trudged along without a word on either side.

"Here's a good spot," said Slinker, finally coming to a halt, and laying down his tools.

"Are you sure this is the path he takes?"

"I wouldn't be such an ass as to make a mistake," was the reply, and then picking up the axe commenced cutting into the ice; when he had got a hole clear through, he inserted his saw, and in about half an hour had cut out a cake at least eight feet square. This he sawed in two, and then forced it down with his pick, and allowed the current to carry it away.

"Now," he said, "let's get away from here, for it's nearly time for him to come along."

They slunk away in the darkness to a point where they could see without being seen, and waited. They were not kept long, for soon after they heard a solitary step on the ice; they dimly saw Huckleberry's figure as he advanced, saw him suddenly disappear, heard his wild, agonized scream, and the fiendish delight of Levi at the success of his ghastly work was emitted in a brutal laugh.

"The third time never fails, they say," he repeated, and then he and Slinker sneaked along in the darkness, and gained the *Antelope's* deck unseen.

And Huckleberry?

So unexpectedly brought out of his brown study by the sense of falling, only vaguely realizing his awful peril, he uttered that shriek; then was plunged deep into the chilling waters, and rose only to find his way to the surface obstructed by the ice.

His brain was still clear; he saw how clearly he was within the cold clutch of an icy death, and his very soul seemed to flutter with horror, as if preparing to fly from its earthly casement.

Tortures are sometimes described, at the hearing of which the hearer's blood runs cold. Mental torture is supposed to be best represented by the murderer in his cell, awaiting the dread hour when he shall expiate on the gallows his dreadful crime. But, ah! this is not so. Give that murderer one minute's lease of life after the drop falls, when he is dangling 'twixt Heaven and earth, and in that small space of time will be compressed an amount of agony that could not be expressed in years.

So it was with Huckleberry.

Conscious, yet *dead*, so surely was he inclosed in the grasp of the dread enemy of all mankind. It was awful!

He shot along with the current, his breath being slowly forced from his body by a fearful sense of oppression on his chest.

Everything began to grow dim, his brain was splitting. He grasped wildly about him, but the only solid thing he touched was the glassy surface of the ice that stood between him and life.

On—on—carried by the current, on to death!

Heavier grew the weight on his breast, the water gurgled and strangled in his throat.

Memory, reason, were tottering on their throne; his head was being crushed in by a slungshot heavier than the one used by Slinker.

He began to sink—fatal commencement of a horrible end.

In his mind he breathed a prayer for mercy to the throne on high, then his struggles ceased, his limbs began to grow rigid and stiff.

Oh, the horrors of that minute's semi-consciousness, the connecting link between life and death.

With limbs thus rigid, with the icy hand of death crawling up to his vitals, that period arrived to Huckleberry.

When the gallows drop has fallen, and the culprit's neck is broken, then must come some such instant of feeling, for one writhing, agonized moment nearly always follows; so with Huckleberry; in that last moment of supreme misery he struggled violently, felt himself ascending, and then—was gone.

Had the murderous scheme of Levi Griggs succeeded?

We shall see.

Dick Larkin was something of a fisherman, and about a quarter of a mile from where Slinker had sawed out the hole in the ice, Dick had cut a number of holes for set-nets, and these he visited three times a day, just after daylight in the morning, during the afternoon, and then just before going to bed on board the *Queen*.

As he was engaged in hauling up one of the nets, there came a sudden weight and strain on it that nearly wrenched the rope from his hands.

Wondering what it could be, Dick kept on pulling; the heavy weight still remained, making it a good tug; but curiosity alone was a sufficient motive to accelerate his movements, and he hauled in as rapidly as possible, keeping his eyes

fastened on the hole lighted up by the rays of one of the boat's lamps.

A cry of horror escaped his lips when the loops of the net and a human head simultaneously came in view; it was fully half a minute before he could stir, so unnerved did the sight make him.

Then, bending down, he turned his hand in the hair and drew the body slowly upward; then got hold of it by the shoulder, and after a supreme exertion drew net and body out together, so entangled that one must come with the other.

He laid the body down, caught up a lamp, held it nearer, and uttered a single cry of anguish.

Stiff and cold, Huckleberry lay before him.

How came he there? Was it accident? Was it foul play? How long had he been there?

These and a thousand other questions flitted through Dick's mind, but were swallowed up by another—

Was he dead?

With him he had a sled, on which was a box for carrying fish, and which was already half full.

He snatched up a knife, cut the entangling ropes of the net, laid Huckleberry in the box on the fish, snatched up the rope and ran over the slippery ice at break-neck speed, dragging the sled behind him.

He reached the *Queen's* side, and a wild yell brought Jemmy out; his grief and consternation can be better imagined than described.

They hoisted the body on board and laid it down beside the glowing stove, and Dick dashed up to the village for the doctor.

With the tears coursing from his eyes Jemmy viewed the body, and then gasped:

"Poor Huckleberry! They called him a vagabond and a pauper, but he was square and honest to the backbone! And if this is the work of them 'ere devils, I'll murder every mother's son of them," he added, fiercely. "Poor Huckleberry!" and his voice was again stricken in misery.

It was, no doubt, a useless task, but Jemmy seized a knife and began cutting off the frozen clothing, stiff as boards.

There was some brandy on board, and after allowing some of it to trickle down between the stiffened lips, he began to chafe the icy limbs with the remainder of the liquor.

The doctor came with Dick.

A minute's examination, and then he cheerfully said:

"He's all right, or will be in a few minutes," and then turned him on his stomach to work out the water; but none came, and the doctor looked puzzled.

"How did you bring him to the boat?" he asked Dick.

"On the sled."

"Ah," musingly; and then, with a lighting up of his features, "face down?"

"Yes, sir," said Dick. "I thought it was a rough way to bring him, but he fell that way, and I hadn't time to turn him over."

"Yet that was what saved his life," said the doctor. "The rough jolting and jumping of the sled over the bumps worked the water out, and Jemmy's dose of brandy and chafing helped on the good work; he'll open his eyes in fifteen minutes."

Jemmy looked incredulous, for he could see no sign of life; yet the doctor's prophecy proved true, for in less than that time circulation was fully restored, and then consciousness returned.

Huckleberry opened his eyes, glanced at the faces before him, a vague, mystified look played across his features, and he closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

"Poor fellow!" said the doctor, rightly guessing at what was passing in Huckleberry's mind, "he doesn't realize—he can't realize—that he is really in the land of the living."

Huckleberry kept his eyes closed fully three minutes; he was perfectly conscious of what was passing around him but his brain was in a whirl, and he waited for it to grow steadier.

"Is it you, Jemmy?" he said, "and Dick?"

"Yes."

"How was I saved?"

"Never mind that now," said the doctor. "We must get you to bed the first thing."

They put him in his berth, gave him a large quantity of hot whisky, and covered him so warm that in five minutes he had broken out in a profuse perspiration.

"You're all right now," said the doctor. "Get a good night's rest and I'll answer for your safety."

Huckleberry had been quietly thinking for a few minutes, when turning to the doctor he said:

"If you please, I wish you wouldn't make any mention of this."

"Why not?"

"I have good reasons, but ones which I cannot tell you."

"Very well," said the doctor. "I will do as you wish," and then bidding Huckleberry good-night, he went up the street and home.

Then it was that Huckleberry gave the two friends an outline of what had occurred, and learned how he had been rescued, and also learned that Dick had merely told the doctor that Huckleberry had come near drowning and he had fished him out.

"But the hole in the ice through which you tumbled. How came it there?" said Jemmy, musingly.

"I don't know," said Huckleberry. "It wasn't there when I went to the village."

"Might you not have strayed from the path and tumbled into a fishing hole?"

"No."

"I'm going to investigate," cried Dick, jumping up.

He was not gone long, and when he returned gave them a description of the hole.

"It was sawed out," he said.

"Griggs!" said Jemmy, meaningly.

Huckleberry nodded his head in assent. "But," he added, "we must say nothing about it, for we could not prove anything. Boys, we must watch and wait."

"Be 'on deck' the hull time," cried Dick.

"Yes," was Huckleberry's reply, and then his eyes closed wearily; his two friends said no more, but sat quietly by while he sank off to sleep, and one or the other watched by the bedside all night.

Huckleberry slept until late in the day, and then arose refreshed and well again.

He remained closely on board all day long, but at nightfall he began preparing himself to go out; and it was a significant fact, that he carefully put a revolver in his pocket, having by this time learned that he must meet fire with fire.

He trusted to the ice no longer, but took the longer road on the beach and up the main street; he was going to the *Marslands'* to get some books promised him by Mr. Marsland.

That gentleman departed for the books, leaving Huckleberry and Maud together; the bell rung, and a moment later Levi Griggs stepped into the parlor, and—came face to face with the person he believed to then be a stark, cold corpse, in the icy depths of the lake.

Levi's eyes seemed starting from their sockets, his face blanched, he uttered a shriek of mortal terror, and fell to the floor in a swoon.

Mr. Marsland came running in with the books in his hands, startled and alarmed by that ringing cry.

He grew calmer when he saw what had happened, and he and Huckleberry laid Levi on a sofa, and then began applying restoratives.

Huckleberry waited until Levi began to show signs of returning animation, and then thanked Mr. Marsland for the books and made his exit.

He was scarcely gone when a pair of frightened eyes looked up into Mr. Marsland's face, and he gasped:

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"He—he—Huckleberry!"

"He has just left here."

Levi raised himself to his elbow, gazed earnestly into Mr. Marsland's face, as if to read the truth there, and then said, in a broken and dazed way:

"Then—he is—not—not—dead?"

"No; he is alive, and as well at this moment as I am."

"I don't understand it," gasped Levi, clasping his head in his hands. "I—I—don't feel right; I—I—must have been sick."

"You have been; you fainted away," was the gentleman's reply. "Do you feel better now?"

"Y-e-s," faltered Levi. "Quite strong now; but—I—must go home."

"I'll go with you."

"No—no—o—o!" cried Levi, in terror-stricken tones. "I'm well enough now;" and staggering to the door, he seized his hat, clapped it on his head, darted out, and ran down the street towards the *Antelope*.

His guilty mind condemned him; he saw the officers of the law already on his track, and he fled as only an agonized man can.

He burst in upon Slinker, who sat before the red-hot stove engaged in whittling.

"I've seen him!" gasped Levi.

"Seen who?"

"Huckleberry!"

For the space of an instant Slinker's jaw dropped, and his face paled, and then he cried:

"You've been drinking! You're a darned fool!"

"I've seen him, I tell you," persisted Levi.

"It was his ghost, then."

"No, alive and well."

"Nonsense!"

"I mean it," groaned Levi. "Oh, God, Slinker, let us fly before the dogs of the law are down on us."

"You're ravin' crazy," growled Slinker; "sit down and cool yourself off."

"No—no!" shrieked Levi.

"Sit down!" thundered Slinker; and catching Levi by the throat, he choked him into submission. "You infernal fool," said Slinker, after Levi had grown quieter, "don't you suppose he'd have put the constable on you afore this if he intended to. But he ain't got no proof nohow you can fix it—I took good care of that. You're askeert of your own shadder."

Then he listened to Levi's story of the meeting.

"He was rescued somehow, then; that's all there is about it."

"No—no;" and Levi shuddered. "He bears a charmed life. I knew we couldn't kill him."

"The deuce you say," said Slinker, savagely. "That's all bosh; I'll let daylight into his gizzard yet."

Levi saw the force of the arguments used by Slinker against the possibility of Huckleberry's being able to prove anything against them, and as day after day passed by and he was not molested, Levi began to drop his frightened look, and actually met Huckleberry in the street without turning pale.

As for Huckleberry, the scene at Marsland's convinced him that Levi had had a hand in attempting to make away with him, but deemed it prudent to hold his tongue, since of it he had not the slightest evidence.

During all this time Huckleberry had not been idle.

The season's run had netted over a thousand dollars clear gain; with part of this he had already rented a little house in the village, and put Sally Wood in it; she had kept her promise to abstain from liquor very well, and Huckleberry gave her money for clothing, and when he saw her for the first time in her new home and in her new clothes, he declared she was a lady again.

And Sally Wood, with new instincts for good aroused within her, blessed the day when she had taken from the poorhouse the pauper foundling, our Huckleberry.

The remainder of the profits of the season he expended in repairing the damages to the *Queen* by the season's wear and tear, and in books of an educational character, which Mr. Marsland was kind enough to procure for him, and to get part of which he had chanced at Mr. Marsland's when the meeting with Levi took place.

Ambitious to learn, he appointed himself no very easy tasks, and his studies in addition to his work on the *Queen* kept him busy continually; but he was amply rewarded for his hard work, for when spring came the *Queen* was in splendid condition, and he felt that in less than a year he had stepped from a vagabond and ignorance to a respectable position.

"The ice is breaking up."

This was the cry that ran from lip to lip one morning in early spring, as the residents of Lakeport emerged from their houses.

It was welcome news, for it meant that the long winter was gone; meant that now their isolation from the outside world was a thing of the past—meant traveling by steamer instead of stage—meant new activity, new life in business of every kind.

Huckleberry now laid aside his books with a sigh of regret, and went to work with a will to put the last finishing touches to the preparations for the coming season.

Neither were they idle on board the *Antelope*, and among the additions made was a large fan-blower to increase the draught in the furnaces, by means of which a fire can be more easily regulated, and, if wanted, a brighter, hotter fire than can be obtained by any other means.

With this improvement Levi counted on distancing the *Queen* very easily.

Lakeport Bay was clear of ice, or nearly so, and notices of each boat were posted up advertising the first trip of the season for the next morning.

The composition of Huckleberry's notice was somewhat in advance of a well-remembered one written before by him, the recollection of which caused a blush of shame at his ignorance, as well as a laugh over its mistakes. But taken altogether, he could not have said of which notice he had been most proud.

The two boats got off together the next morning.

Each was in good trim, and each was bent on beating the other.

The *Queen* was no longer considered a wild-cat boat that might haul off at any time; though an opposition line, she was considered as regular.

The *Antelope* made better time than ever before,

and for a while she threatened to bear off the palm.

"Don't save any coal, Jemmy," called Huckleberry.

And Jemmy obeyed to the letter.

However, it was nip and tuck, day after day, sometimes one being ahead and then again the other.

The first trip the *Queen* got in ten minutes ahead.

Levi was elated at having got thus close, and invited Slinker up the street to have a drink.

Slinker lounged behind after Levi had returned to the boat; suddenly he gave a start, then approached a broad-shouldered, rough-looking fellow, and whispered:

"You was on board the *Lake Queen*, last fall, when her captain's head was mashed."

The fellow was going to strike Slinker, when the latter said:

"Hist! it's all right, I won't give you away. Sit down and have a drink. And now," after putting down his empty glass, "how came you on board?"

"You're not an officer?"

"No."

"It's just this, then. I was trying to steal a passage to Lakeport; I sneaked on board, found the door of a state-room unlocked, went in, and crept under the bunk; a long while after we'd left Railroadville, being curious to know how far we'd got, I left the state-room, and the next I knowed a feller was poppin' away at me as if I was of no more consequence than an old ram cat. I jumped on the ice with a bullet in my leg, and skipped to shore nearly froze to death; that's how it was."

If Huckleberry and Jemmy could have only heard that explanation.

"I am going to light out of this town, right away," said the man; "for I hear the *Queen* commenced runnin' to-day; some of the fellers might spot me, and though I am innocent, the evidence would go a good way agin me."

"Don't you skip at all," said Slinker.

"Why?"

"Cause them 'ere fellows wouldn't know you from the blind side of a house."

In this Slinker was right; so great was the excitement of Jemmy and Dick that neither had the faintest idea of how he even looked.

"They might," was the doubtful reply, "and I tell you I can't afford to have any charge brought agin me."

Google Slinker winked at the man; he understood the case precisely.

"They won't be able to make any charge, never fear. No, my boodle, you just stay here. I may be able to put a good thing or two in your way."

"I'm agreeable," said the other.

They exchanged names, and pledged each other in a bumper of whisky, and then parted.

Google Slinker went on board, and began pumping Levi about his feelings toward Huckleberry.

"I hate him worse than poison," hissed Levi.

"But it's no use, I can't do anything against him."

"For a trifle I could do him some damage," suggested Slinker.

"Yes," snarled Levi. "You got your money for murdering him, and blowing up the *Queen*, and you failed in both; you got your money for drowning him, and the next day he turns up alive and well. I'll have no more work of that kind."

"But you will," muttered Slinker, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER PLOT.

By virtue of having carried the mail after the *Antelope* had ceased running in the fall, Huckleberry received the contract for carrying it from the opening of navigation until the end of the mail year, the first of May.

The boats ran nip and tuck day after day, and week after week; the first of May was drawing near, and there was talk of giving out the mail contract for a year.

Mr. Marshall strongly favored giving it to Huckleberry, but there were many others who as strongly advocated its being carried by the *Antelope*, which they claimed, and not without justice either, had been the first boat to carry it, was the oldest established line, and should be given the preference.

Huckleberry's services of the fall before were commented upon, and a good deal of spirit was beginning to be manifested, when an old gentleman, hoping to make peace, arose and said:

"Gentlemen, there is no use wrangling over so small a matter. Let the matter rest on the merits of the parties. We want the mail carried, and we want to receive it as soon as possible. There-

fore, say I, give it to that boat which can make the best time.

"This is Wednesday, the twenty-eighth of April; Tuesday will be the last day of the month; let the boats start on Tuesday morning, prepared to make the best possible time, and then award the contract to the fastest boat."

This proposition was accepted by all, and you may be sure neither boat had been at her pier five minutes before their respective captains knew the result of the meeting.

"I guess we're safe," said Huckleberry.

"We've got 'em!" exclaimed Levi.

"Don't be too sure of that," said Slinker.

"You must remember we've been a runnin' with the blower on all the time, and we don't know as how they've had to crowd the *Queen* in the least."

This was a damper on Levi's enthusiasm, and he impatiently exclaimed:

"I'd give a thousand dollars to beat him on Friday, if it was only for the satisfaction of the thing."

"Will you stand by them words?"

"Yes."

"I'll fix it, then, so you can beat 'em," said Slinker, lowering his voice.

"How?" asked Levi.

"Never mind. If you beat the *Queen* you gives me a thousand dollars; if she beats us, I get nothing."

"Well—"

"Is it a bargain?" Slinker interrupted.

"Yes," answered the young villain.

Thursday morning the rival steamers got off in fine style, and made Railroadville without a minute's difference.

"It'll be a tug, Jemmy," said Huckleberry. "You must make a clean fire for to-morrow, for we'll have to crowd her most likely. And now you'd better go and see about getting in some good clean coal."

No sooner had the *Antelope* touched the dock, than Slinker was off and hurrying up the street; he dove into a gin-mill, looked around, then beckoned to the fellow who carried Dick Larkins' bullet in his leg.

"I've struck a job for you."

"What is it?"

"You see these 'ere things?" and Slinker cautiously drew from his pocket two dark objects about the size and shape of eggs.

"Yes."

"Well, I've got a few more of 'em here in my pocket."

"I understand."

"Well, I want 'em buried in the coal on board of the *Queen*."

"Oh, I see," said the other. "Fizz—bang!" and in pantomime he illustrated a blowing up.

"You savvy correctly," returned Slinker. "Can you do it?"

"I don't know," was the slow and meditative reply. "Depends summat on the price of the job."

"Ten dollars."

"Pish!"

"Don't turn up your nose at it, my brave fellow," said Slinker. "Ten dollars ain't picked up every day. It's just as easy to do as cuttin' cheese; you walk on board, drop 'em in the coal, cover them up with your foot, and the thing's done."

"Say twenty and I'll do it."

"Well—I—can't—yes—I will," said Slinker, hesitating doubtfully, to cover up his real joy at getting the fiendish business done so cheaply.

"Go now," he said, passing over the dark objects. "I'll wait here for you."

Half an hour later the fellow returned.

"It's done," he said. "A fellow was wheeling coal on board; when he left the barrow for a minute I chucked 'em in and covered 'em up."

"Here's the lucre, then," and Slinker passed it over; the guilty twain separated, and the greater villain of the two muttered to himself:

"I've fixed 'em; if they go off this afternoon, I've fixed 'em; if they go off to-morrow mornin', I've fixed 'em; I've fixed 'em anyhow," chewing which pleasurable mental cud he boarded the *Antelope*.

The two boats kept in sight on the return trip until they reached the last landing, for which the *Queen* had considerable freight, while the *Antelope* had none; for this reason the latter soon ran out of sight.

When within ten miles of Lakeport, Jemmy went to look at his fires, and threw on a few shovels of coal; he had scarcely closed the furnace doors when there came a quick, sharp report, and this was succeeded by another one immediately afterward; there came a rending crash, and a huge quantity of red hot coals were flung downward into the water-filled ash-pan; instantly arose a great cloud of steam that went rushing up through the engine-room, and then

poured out until the lower deck was obscured completely.

As is usual the women on board screamed loudly, and brainless men, with a lack of common sense, rushed madly hither and thither, snatching life-preservers from the hands of weak women, and amused themselves by alternately cursing and praying.

Huckleberry heard the two sharp reports followed by the screams, and ringing the bell to stop the engine, he belayed the wheel, and rushed down-stairs.

"Order!" he shouted. "There is no danger!" and he interposed himself between the door and the excited crowd struggling to get outside to fling themselves from the deck into the water.

"Get out of my way!" shouted a frenzied man, and he made a dash at Huckleberry, who quick as lightning hit him a blow under the chin that carried him off his feet.

Animated by Huckleberry's coolness several gentlemen joined their endeavors to his, and the cloud of steam having grown thinner, they succeeded in allaying apprehension.

Jemmy was sought for a solution of the problem, and explained what he had done, and finished by stating that more than half of the grate bars had been broken and twisted out of shape and lay in the ash-pan.

It had occurred immediately after putting on fresh coal.

"Examine every ounce of coal," ordered Huckleberry.

Presently three egg-shaped objects were fished up, and handed to him; a crowd stood curiously by.

"Hand-grenades!" said a gentleman, catching a glimpse of them. "Good God, if it should have exploded the boilers."

"Couldn't do it very well," remarked another gentleman. "The force of the material of which hand-grenades are made is downward. But the question is how came they there?"

"Yes, how?" then questioned fifty others.

"The fiends!" said Huckleberry, bitterly, under his breath; then aloud: "Jemmy, can we make Lakeport?"

"I guess so, captain."

The crowd dispersed, Huckleberry returned to his post, and at midnight they fastened to the pier.

Levi Griggs danced with joy at the news; and Slinker said:

"Didn't I tell you so? I'll take the spondulix."

"Not yet," said Levi. "Wait until to-morrow. I've been disappointed before."

Huckleberry was down-hearted: what was to be done? Such a thing as a grate-bar could not be found in Lakeport.

He clenched his hands and gritted his teeth, for his patience was fast wearing out with the villains who had done this thing.

"Can anything be done, Jemmy?" he asked gloomily.

"I can cover the hole with boiler-iron," said Jemmy. "It'll give us an awful bad draught, though, and we won't be able to make time."

"And we'll lose the mail," said Huckleberry, bitterly.

"Captain," said Dick Larkin, sinking his voice, "why not serve them as they have you?"

"No, Dick; the right must come out best at the end."

"The end 'pears to be 'a mighty long way off," muttered Dick.

The two separated, Jemmy to try and repair damages, Huckleberry going to bed, and Dick Larkin on the watch, the whole-souled lad pacing up and down the deck muttering to himself; suddenly he exclaimed:

"I'll do it, and take the consequences on my own shoulders."

He went ashore, jumped into a small boat and pulled away from the beach; it was over an hour later when he returned with a grin on his face as big as a washtub.

The bells had ceased tolling, the lines were cast off. Huckleberry stood in the pilot-house, down-hearted and blue; but he could not help smiling gladly when the huge crowd on the dock spontaneously offered the *Queen* three rousing cheers.

And both of the steamers were crowded by those who wanted to witness the race between them.

When informed that the *Queen* had met with an accident, those who backed her said, confidently:

"Oh, that's all right. That's fixed before this time. Huckleberry is not to be beaten."

Five miles had been added to mile, and still the boats were close on, and Huckleberry thought bitterly:

"He's playing with me. He knows I can't make time, and that he can run away from me when he pleases."

The last landing had been made; the boats got off not two hundred yards apart.

Railroadville was a mile off; the boats were

side by side; Jemmy darted to the gangway, and when he saw how matters stood the puzzled look on his face deepened,

Dick Larkin stepped beside him.

"Jemmy, that craft is remarkably slow this mornin', ain't she?" and a low, gleeful chuckle rippled from his lips.

Jemmy looked at him.

Dick winked slowly and mysteriously.

That wink spoke volumes.

"Hurrah!" cried Jemmy. "Then there's a fair, square show," and he darted toward the engine-room, then stopped an instant and sharply cried: "Dick, toss that barrel of hams into the fire-room; I'll be responsible."

Down went the hams, and into the furnace; and on went pitch pine wood.

The *Queen* was beginning to take the lead.

"*Queen's* ahead! Hip—hip—hurrah!"

"No—no—no!" came a wild shout from the *Antelope*, less than fifty feet away. "We're gaining—ha, ha!—we take the lead."

"*Queen's* ahead!"

"*Antelope* gains!"

"*Queen's* got it!"

"Never! *Queen's* losing!"

"Git out of the way! We'll run you down!"

"Bah!"

"We gain—a neck—we're shooting past—the *Queen* forever!" and a cap went flying up in the air.

And Huckleberry and Levi Griggs from the pilot-houses glared fiercely at each other.

What had happened to the *Antelope*?

Which would win?

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK'S SHARP PRACTICE.

"*Queen's* ahead!"

"*Antelope* wins!"

"No, she don't!"

"Never!"

The passengers on both boats were carried away with excitement, and crowding to the rail, gave vent to such exclamations as the foregoing, while the more enthusiastic in each crowd flung their hat-gear high in the air, until one old gentleman lost his overboard, after which accident this style of demonstration ceased.

Huckleberry could hardly believe his eyes, but, yes, there could be no doubting the fact that the *Queen* was a few feet ahead.

He had supposed all along that Griggs was merely playing with him, so as to run away from the *Queen* at the last minute, and thus making Huckleberry feel the defeat more keenly.

A dim suspicion was awakened in the latter's mind that he had been mistaken, that the *Antelope* had been doing her best.

"Crowd her all you can, Jimmy," he called through the tube.

"Crowd it is to the end of the chapter," sung back the engineer.

Then cheers and a tiger poured from the throats of those on board of the *Queen*.

It could no longer be gainsaid, Huckleberry was clearly leading.

He saw Levi Griggs dancing around the pilot-house like mad, alternately cursing his luck, and then the engineer.

Huckleberry kept the *Queen* head on, and brought her beside the pier by a short turn, backed water, and Dick Larkin was not slow in getting out the lines.

They had beaten the *Antelope* by five minutes, and despite the remembrance of Levi Griggs leaning from the pilot-house window, shaking his first savagely, Huckleberry felt so elated that he could hardly sit still.

"Now, Jemmy," he said, "get off for the new grate bars."

"All right, captain."

"And don't let the grass grow under your feet, or we'll not get them in by starting time."

"I'm off," and Jemmy started for the foundry.

On board of the *Antelope*, Levi was stamping and cursing like a corsair.

He had counted so fully on winning the race, that it galled him to the very soul to be defeated. He at first attributed it to the engineer, but found, on examination, bright fires and a splendid head of steam; so he cursed the unknown cause the more soundly because of his very ignorance.

Nor was Google Slinker in a much better frame of mind.

He was twenty dollars out of pocket, and besides, felt that he was losing caste with Levi.

But, cooler-headed than his employer, he sat down to ferret out the cause of their unaccountable failure, but no reason could he assign for it.

Jemmy got the grate-bars in all right, and had a glowing fire when the bell rang to start.

Huckleberry braced up, expecting another

brush with the *Antelope*, but to his amazement found that she was slowly dropping astern.

"Their fan-blower must have broken down," he thought, this appearing to him the only solution of the problem. "They couldn't keep heavy fires this morning, and can't now."

He would have been somewhat surprised could he then have seen the fan-blower in full blast on board the *Antelope*. Despite this, she did not reach Lakeport until more than half an hour after the *Queen* had fastened to her pier and discharged her passengers.

Saturday, the first of May.

It was a red-letter day in Huckleberry's life, for it marked the point when he attained the dignity of transporting the U. S. mail.

Railroadville was reached by the *Queen* on time; the *Antelope* was forty minutes late.

Google Slinker growled during the whole trip, for the steamer seemed loath to obey her rudder.

"Curse it!" he snarled; "the wheel works awful heavy. I noticed yesterday morning for the first."

Levi heard this; then a look of intelligence lighted up his face.

"Maybe that's got something to do with our losing yesterday," he remarked.

Slinker looked hard at him a minute, then exclaimed:

"By the Eternal! b'lieve you've struck it square."

"What's to be done?"

"We must haul out when we get back to-night."

"A good idea."

If Dick Larkin could only have heard this short conversation.

The *Queen* was discharging her freight, and Huckleberry was sitting with book and pencil in hand, when a man approached and stated that he was charged with a barrel of hams which he had not received.

"I knows about them 'ere, captain," said Dick, stepping up and whispering a few words in his ear.

"We'll make it all right," said Huckleberry, and the man departed.

Jemmy having been told by Dick, came out.

"How much was them 'ere hams?" he muttered.

"I want to pay for 'em."

"Nonsense," said Huckleberry; "you'll do no such thing. If it hadn't been for them we might not have had the carrying of that mail-bag yonder," and he pointed to the article mentioned just as it was brought on board.

Again the *Queen* arrived at Lakeport more than half an hour in advance of her rival.

The *Antelope* was run to the ship's ways and hauled out some time after dark, so that Levi was forced to forego any examination until the next morning; then he and Slinker dropped down from the deck, passed the paddle-boxes, and made their way across the heavy timbers on which the steamer rested, toward her stern.

"Well," gasped Slinker, suddenly, "I'll be teetotally derved! Look there!" and he pointed at the rudder.

Levi's gaze followed the direction indicated, and he saw stringing out behind the steamer and fastened to her rudder about eighty feet of heavy iron cable.

"No wonder she steered heavy!" cried Slinker. "No wonder she went slow."

"No," slowly said Levi.

"That," said Slinker, facing his employer, and speaking with emphasis, "never got there itself."

"No, of course not."

"Then it was put there by—that poor-house pauper, as you call him."

"The hound!"

"And a very neat job it is!" exclaimed Slinker admiringly, for there was something in the trick that accorded with his own evil, secret ways.

"It was a plot to defeat us," cried Levi, hoarse with anger. "I'll break his contract."

Slinker impressively laid his right fore-finger beside his nose.

"As I said before, it's a very neat job, but—you can't prove it!"

This he had sufficient common-sense to see, but that, however, did nothing toward cooling his hot blood.

The chain was removed, but not before several youths from the village had seen it, and consequently all Lakeport knew of the ruse by which the *Antelope* was beaten before nightfall.

Some thought it a shrewd piece of business and called Huckleberry a shrewd fellow; others again denounced it as a piece of knavishness well fitting the vagabond.

But there were a few, among them Mr. Marsland, who denied that Huckleberry had any complicity in the affair, to which they felt sure he would not stoop.

Jemmy and Dick stood together when an urchin informed them of the "find," and when

Jemmy got a safe opportunity he could not forbear a smile and an admiring wink, which said as plainly as words:

"Dick, you're a trump."

"Don't mention it to the captain," said Dick, when their informant had gone.

"Nary a word."

Mr. Marsland was on board the next morning, and plumply asked Huckleberry if he knew anything about the chain.

"What chain?" asked Huckleberry, innocently, he having remained on board all day Sunday, and consequently having heard nothing of it.

When Mr. Marsland had explained, Huckleberry earnestly said:

"Mr. Marsland, I give you my word that I never knew or heard anything of it until you told me."

"I was sure it was so," thought the gentleman, as he turned away.

Huckleberry was now aware that this trickery was charged to him, and he felt badly about it, and began wondering how he could remove the imputation; if he only could learn who had put it there; who could it have been?

Evidently some friend of his.

Dick's words popped into his mind, and he remembered the way in which they had been uttered.

He quietly called Dick aside, and asked him plumply about it.

"Yes, sir, I did it," was the honest reply.

"After my telling you not to do anything at all?"

"Yes," and he hung his head.

"How did you do it?"

"I'd seen 'em put drags on sailin' vessels afore now; I knew that the old cable was a lyin' on the dock, an' all impulsive-like, I rushed off and done it."

Some angry words were on Huckleberry's lips; but when he looked into the honest face of the whole-hearted lad, who would, he knew, do anything in the world for him, they died away under his breath, and he simply said:

"Never do the like again, Dick. Now you can go."

And Dick, glad to get off so easy, scooted away at a lively rate, leaving Huckleberry silent and thoughtful.

Having for several days just managed to catch the train, Huckleberry had a conversation with Jemmy about a fan-blower, and the result was that within a week one had been placed in position, and with its aid they added a mile or two to their usual rate of speed.

CHAPTER XIV.

TIGHT WORK.

It was some time after being paralyzed by coming into contact with Huckleberry in Mr. Marsland's house, before Levi Griggs gained courage to call again on Maud.

His singular illness was reverted to, and uneasily fidgeting, he hastened to change the subject. Maud's eyes were fixed on him, and he could not help wondering if she mistrusted him in any way.

He called there regularly now, and began to look upon himself in the light of an accepted suitor, although he had never lisped a word of love to Maud, not daring to, in short.

Huckleberry never came now more than once or twice a month, and then remained but a short while. At first Mrs. Marsland always accompanied her daughter into the parlor, but now Maud came alone.

Never a day passed but Huckleberry heard the names of Maud and Levi coupled together, and somehow it always caused a depression of spirits, and raised an indefinable feeling of antagonism towards Levi; not of a nature, however, that would incite him to do Levi any injury, for Huckleberry was the soul of honor. Sometimes he would hear somebody speak of these two persons, even when at the very gate of the Marslands, and he would enter the parlor gloomy and sad.

The first word spoken by Maud would drive it away as mist disappears from the morning sun, and one glance into her blue eyes, and his heart would beat high—a vague hope would enter his mind.

The Marslands were gathered in their sitting-room one evening; the bell rang, and the servant announced Mr. Wood.

"Show him into the parlor," said Maud quickly, her face lighting up at the mention of his name.

Mr. Marsland's eyes chanced to be on her at the minute; her air, her tone riveted his attention; his brows raised slightly in surprise, and then he became thoughtful.

But he kept his reflections to himself and said

nothing, but looked sharply into Maud's pleased, flushed face, when, her visitor gone, she returned to the sitting-room.

The next day he was favored with a call from Mr. Griggs.

After passing of compliments and an amount of small talk, both became silent; Mr. Griggs hemmed once or twice, and Mr. Marsland knew that the object of this visit would now come out.

"My dear Mr. Marsland," began Griggs, "I don't know as we have exactly to settle affairs for the young folks, but as you know, Levi has taken a fancy to Maud, and it looks something like business. Such being the case, I thought that as Levi hadn't the pluck to find out himself—I'd find out how you regarded the matter."

Mr. Marsland replied:

"To begin with, Maud is entirely too young to get married; but when she does she shall marry who she chooses—that is, nearly so."

"Exactly! Then you have no objections to Levi that you know of?"

"I have not."

"Very good," said Griggs, and artfully added; "I think the young folks have pretty nearly settled the matter, and there'll be no trouble unless—" and he halted with the air of one seeking for language to best express his idea.

"Unless what?" asked his host, after waiting some seconds for him to resume.

"Unless—that is—well, to get at it in another way, have you never thought that your daughter might take a notion to some other fellow, say like this upstart, Huckleberry?"

Mr. Marsland had thought of this very thing; it had been in his mind all day; but he answered for policy sake:

"No, certainly not. He is too sensible to think of ever aspiring to my daughter's hand."

"You think so," sneered Griggs. "But you are mistaken; the low-born hound has become a fortune-hunter; that is why I came here to-day to warn you; I have no personal interest in wishing Levi married, but, sir, if they are to be married, why not have it over at once, and run no chances?"

Griggs watched Mr. Marsland's face sharply and waited his reply with feverish eagerness.

"Maud would not marry anybody without my consent."

"But there is danger; you can see it."

"A bare possibility," said Mr. Marsland, coolly, not caring that his visitor should see how much perturbation of mind the conversation had caused him.

And so they parted.

Mr. Marsland went over the ground in his mind. Huckleberry was a brave, whole-souled fellow; he liked him, was pleased to look on him in the light of a *protege*, but as to his marrying Maud—impossible.

Like a politic man, however, he kept his conclusions to himself.

He met Huckleberry several days later, and the young man parted with him with a swelling heart.

Mr. Marsland had changed toward him, was colder, more business-like; in his heart Huckleberry guessed what might be the reason, and though Maud Marsland watched and waited, Huckleberry did not call again; learning this, Levi Griggs gloated over the pain he knew Huckleberry must feel over the withdrawal of Mr. Marsland's favor.

A few weeks slipped by; it was on a Saturday, just before they left Railroadville, that the captains of each of the steamers received a notice that the western-bound train would start half an hour earlier in the morning.

"Good enough!" said Huckleberry.

"That means start half an hour earlier," said Griggs. "Well, it won't do to give t'other fellows any advantage."

He wrote out his notices of a change of time, and sauntered around that evening to post them up in Lakeport; but look where he would he saw no notices of the *Queen's*, so kept his own in his pocket; when none were posted by Sunday afternoon he began to grow restless, and finally hired a boy to go on board the *Queen* and find out what time she was to leave in the morning.

"Usual time, sir, he said," was the answer brought back.

"He can never make Railroadville in time," muttered Griggs with an oath. Taking out his notices, he tore them into bits and scattered them on the street. "If he can afford to miss the train I can."

He went on board the *Antelope* and told Slinker, who instantly looked wise, and remarked:

"There is something under this, there is; now what?" and he set himself to thinking.

"I'll prevent his beating us, anyway," he said at last, looking at Levi.

"I'll file through a link of his rudder-chain;

after he's used the wheel, and there comes a little extra strain, away goes the link, the chain parts and he's helpless."

"By Jove! the very thing; and if it should lay him up, we get the mail contract; Slinker, let's take a drink to success."

Unheard, unseen, Slinker made his way beneath the *Queen's* stern in the midnight hours; remained there awhile, and then returned undetected.

Jemmy had a strong head of steam on, for they would need it all now, since they had half an hour less for the run.

"The blower's the thing," he said, gaily. "We'll leave the *Antelope* a long way behind this time."

The boats got away together, and the *Antelope* being crowded to her utmost, kept pretty well up.

Ten miles of the distance was accomplished, when suddenly the *Queen's* head swung around, and she commenced describing a circle in the water, much to Huckleberry's astonishment.

He threw the wheel hard to starboard, but it did not bring her up; he worked the wheel the other way, and was struck with its working so easy; then he remembered a slight jar, and guessed what was wrong.

"The rudder chain has broken," he said with a lengthened face, glancing anxiously toward the *Antelope*; then he gave Jemmy the bell to stop, and looking again at the rival steamer, now just abreast.

He saw two individuals in the pilot house, and one of them was gyrating and dancing to express glee over something; it looked like Levi Griggs—Huckleberry bit his lips—he must see to the rudder chain without the loss of any time, for every minute they lay idly here the *Antelope* was forging ahead.

He rang the gangway bell.

"On deck!" cried Dick, springing outside and turning his face upward.

"Clear away the boat, Dick, and be quick!"

"Ay-ay, sir," and the williag lad sprang so readily to the task, and worked so rapidly that the boat was all unguyed and ready for dropping into the water at the time Huckleberry reached the lower deck.

"Open the furnace doors and come with me, Jemmy," said Huckleberry, and presently they both entered the small boat and dropped toward the *Queen's* stern.

"What's the matter?" asked Jemmy.

"Steering chain parted, as near as I can judge," was the reply. "Yes, that's the case," as he caught sight of the dangling ends, one of which he picked up a few seconds later.

A low cry of anger fell from his lips.

"See there," he cried; "this is some more devil's work!"

Slinker had only filed the link through on one side, and it had remained hooked in one end of the parted chain.

Jemmy looked at it, then said:

"It was filed."

"Yes."

"It's too bad to be treated this way," said Jemmy, indignantly.

"We'll not stand it any longer," returned Huckleberry, a quiet, stern air of resolution hanging about word and manner. "But, Jemmy, what's to be done? Can you fix this?"

Jemmy thought a moment, then clapped his hands.

"I've got a toggle-link in the engine-room, just the thing, by Jove! All I'll have to do is to make a pin for the bolt."

"Well, hurry up; don't let's drift around here any longer than we can help."

They hastened to the engine-room, and Jemmy worked with a will.

In ten minutes he had the bolt-pin, and springing into the boat with a wrench and a small hand-vise, they dropped astern again, picked up the broken ends, drew them together, put in the link, and bolted it.

Back to the gangway they hurried, and Dick took charge of the small boat.

"How about the train; we'll miss it now, as we've lost nearly half an hour."

"Not at all," was the quiet reply. "I'll sink the *Queen* or beat Griggs after his devilish spitefulness."

"How?"

"That's for me to know. All I ask of you is to keep up steam—shove her along as fast as you can, and obey bells as quick as God will let you;" and Huckleberry hastened away, cool and quiet to outward appearance, yet with keen excitement glowing within his breast.

By the time he reached the pilot-house the *Antelope* was disappearing from sight around Point Barren, six miles away, after passing which there was a straightaway course for a few miles, and then the coast receded, leaving a bay, nestling at the edge of which was the principal landing of the boats between Lakeport and Railroadville.

Point Barren belonged to Barren Island, and Huckleberry was but a mile distant from a very narrow channel, which separated it from the mainland.

Toward this channel Huckleberry laid the *Queen's* head; a grim smile played about his lips; if he could get through the channel, he would cut off more miles than the *Antelope* had gained, and beat her to the landing.

"Good God! where are you going?" excitedly asked an individual, rushing up to the pilot house.

"Through that channel."

"Suppose we can't get through?"

"Then we can't."

"But the rocks! You can almost touch 'em with your hand. Suppose we get mashed up on 'em."

"Suppose we do; nobody could get drowned, for the boat couldn't sink, as there's not two feet of water clear under her keel this very minute."

The hearer turned pale, and relapsed into a horrified silence.

On they sped through the narrow channel, with not more than ten feet to spare at any point.

Huckleberry never slowed up a bit, but hugged first one shore and then the other to get around the bad curves.

"Stop!" yelled the horrified individual, now regaining his speech. "You can't go any further, the water stops right ahead."

"There's a sharp bend there which you can't follow with your eyes; that's all," said Huckleberry, and yet with "that's all," he caught his own breath, and his cheek slightly paled, for he had reached the worst part of the channel; if he could get around this bend, almost a perfect right angle, he would be all right; if not he would have to back out the long distance he had come, as there was not room enough anyhow to turn her about.

He rang the gang-way bell, sharply.

"On deck!" came Dick's cheery voice.

"Get out our strongest line, Dick, and stand by the forward cleet!"

"Ay—ay, sir," and Dick took up his position.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the angle, and Huckleberry drew his breath hard and fierce.

One bell—slow down!

His eyes leaped along the shores; there would not be a foot of room to spare; he saw an old stump at the extremity of the point.

"On deck!" he called.

"Ay—ay, sir," returned Dick.

"Everything depends on you, so be careful; throw your line over that stump and snub her up short."

"Ay—ay, sir," and Dick planted himself with eyes fixed on the stump.

Every one had crowded forward to where they could see what was going on, and each person in the crowd, Huckleberry included, held his breath.

The steamer's prow glided past the point toward the bank just opposite, into which she must plunge if Dick made a mishrow; it was a ticklish moment, and very tight work.

"Now!" called Huckleberry.

Dick measured the distance, and flung out the rope; the noose settled on the stump, and he quickly snubbed the rope on the cleet; Huckleberry rang the jingle bell for full steam, the rope squeaked, the stump strained; the *Queen's* head was warped around.

"Run the rope a little!" ordered Huckleberry, and in one minute more the *Queen* was safely around the dangerous corner, and everybody breathed a sigh of relief.

The engine was stopped, until the rope could be drawn on board, and then, the channel growing wider and deeper, they put on steam, left Barren Island channel, skirted the shore of the bay and were lying at the pier when the *Antelope* came in sight, a mile or more away.

Levi Griggs gazed dumbfounded at the *Queen* and her commander, moving gracefully away as they neared the pier; gazed and gnashed his teeth with mingled grief and rage.

CHAPTER XV.

ACCUSED OF BURGLARY.

AIDED by the blower the *Queen* was able to make far better time than ever before, and reached Railroadville in time for the train, the rival boat arriving nearly half an hour later.

Once more the *Antelope* endeavored making time, and then, finding it impossible, gave up the job, and started half an hour earlier in the morning. This threw most of the trade into Huckleberry's hands, as people would sooner take the last boat as long as they saved no time by going on the first.

Huckleberry did not essay the Barren Island channel again, but Levi Griggs, finding out how the *Queen* had managed to pass them on the

morning when he thought her placed *hors du combat*, determined to try the passage one morning when he had been somewhat belated in starting, knowing full well that he could never go the full course and manage to connect with the train.

Slinker was a good pilot, but did not understand the intricacies of the narrow channel, nor did he think of warping his boat around the angle as Huckleberry had done. The rudder failed to bring the vessel up sharp enough, and the *Antelope* struck her nose against the bank of earth and rock, and tore away the cutwater; backing up, the rudder struck, and jammed that up pretty badly; starting forward again, they were thrown over against the point of the angle, and one revolution too much smashed a dozen buckets of the wheel, and broke the outer rim to pieces; backing up again they tore away part of the rail; and going ahead to escape further damage in that direction, they ran hard on a rock concealed beneath the surface.

And there they were forced to remain all day, the deck-hands rowing the passengers in small boats to the distant landing.

It took them a full week to get her off and repair the damages, during which time the *Queen* reaped a golden harvest.

Levi's venturing the passage had more effects than this, however, as the following conversation will show.

"I want some money."

"And so do I," said Mr. Griggs, and his face expressed the deepest concern and anxiety. "I had depended on the earnings of the boat to replace that money, for there is a meeting of the trustees in a week, and the deficit will be discovered, and then the game is up."

"You don't mean to say it is as bad as that?"

"I do."

Levi became grave.

"Is there no way of covering it up?"

"None without the collusion of the cashier and I daren't approach him."

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

"I don't know," was the troubled and despondent answer.

"Well," said Levi, after a few minutes' of silence, "I see two ways out of the difficulty."

"What are they?" eagerly asked his father.

"One is an immediate marriage with Maud Marsland."

"Her father won't force her; and you know how good or poor your chances are with the girl herself. No, it won't answer. The other?"

"Suppose the bank was broken into and the safe robbed?" and Levi looked slyly at his father to see what effect his words would have.

The elder Griggs was aghast at first, but matters had reached a desperate crisis, and after a short silence, he said:

"That would cover the loss and we'd have something besides. Is it safe, though?"

"As safe as your own little venture of some years ago," returned Levi, at which his father winced.

"Who'll do it?"

"You, myself and Slinker."

"Me?"

"Yes; we'd want your help."

"I can't."

"But you must! What else can be done?"

"Nothing."

"Consequently you must help us. But I have another idea still."

"What is it?"

"If I can't marry Maud Marsland in a week I can't. But suppose she was abducted! How much reward do you suppose her dad would pay for her return?"

"Any amount, almost."

"Then she shall be abducted."

"No, no, Levi; your share in the transaction would come to light."

"No, it wouldn't; she'd never see me."

"How would you do it?"

"Leave that to me. I'll talk it over with Slinker; he'll arrange things somehow; we'll abduct her a week from to-night. Ah, what's that?" and he sprang to his feet.

"What!" cried his father, also arising hastily and glancing towards the open door, which, owing to the lateness of the hour, they had thought unnecessary to shut.

"I thought I saw some one slip past through the hall," and catching up the lamp he hurried outside, but could see or hear nothing. "It must have been my imagination," he remarked, as he set the lamp back on the table; "good-night."

"Good-night."

A week had gone by.

The *Queen* was tied fast for the night, and everything had been made snug and tidy before Huckleberry started up the road to the village.

It was hard on nine o'clock when he stepped into the post-office and inquired if there were any letters for him.

The postmaster handed out one; a plain white envelope, the address written in a feminine hand.

He opened it, wondering from whom it came; unfolded the sheet of note-paper, and starting with surprise, read:

"There is a plot to abduct Maud Marsland from her home to-night. How it is to be done I don't know; but for God's sake prevent it. Do not throw this aside, for this is the truth, so help me Heaven!"

It had no date, no name, no address attached to it. Huckleberry glanced at the envelope, and found it postmarked Lakeport.

"Who mailed this?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the reply he received.

"It was dropped in the outside box after we closed last night."

What was to be done?

Huckleberry felt for his revolver—he always carried one now, and found it safe; unconsciously he strode out of the office, and towards Mr. Marsland's, on a brisk walk.

He vaulted the fence and concealed himself in the lilac bushes for awhile, then approached the open window of Maud's room, the location of which he knew, and after a minute's hesitation sprang through the window; slowly and unthinkingly he advanced into the room, and was at its furthest side from the window, when the noise of a hand on the knob made his heart jump into his throat.

He was in a bad dilemma.

To be caught prowling around the premises in this style would lay him open to suspicion of attempting to rob the house; he could not escape by the window—he had not the time.

His breath came quick and heavy. What should he do?

An open closet door was before him. Acting on the impulse of the moment he sprang into the closet and shut himself in.

The hall door opened. He heard Maud say "Good-night," and then close and lock the door.

Huckleberry trembled from head to foot; if she opened the closet for anything he was gone. In an agony of apprehension, with the perspiration streaming from every pore, nearly smothered, he listened to the girl's preparations for retiring, and after fumbling with the window heard her step into bed.

He breathed freer. For the present he was safe.

An hour had passed; she must be asleep by this time, Huckleberry thought, and opened the door so as to get a little fresh air; but he still remained ensconced in the closet, waiting for the appearance of the abductors.

Twelve o'clock had passed. He heard the clock in another room strike one. Surely it was time if any such villainy was to be perpetrated. He waited half an hour longer, and then determined to try and make his exit.

He stepped softly out of the closet and cautiously stole along toward the window. As he passed the bedside he could not forbear a downward glance, and—Huckleberry gasped and nearly fell—as he saw Maud's eyes wide open and gazing at him.

He expected to hear her scream, but she remained quiet. He was going to make a bolt for the window, then paused, and gasped:

"Miss Marsland, I mean you no harm. I came to save you from danger which imperiled you, as God is my judge. Do you—can you believe me?"

"Yes," was the simple reply.

"The danger is over, I think," said Huckleberry; "but it may not be; after I go, close and lock your windows; forgive me if I have done wrong—I didn't mean to enter your room—never speak of it to any one, though, for it might—you know how people talk."

"Yes," said Maud, slowly; "now go, please."

Huckleberry raised the sash and leaped to the ground; he remained until he had heard her catch the fastening, and then he started for the boat.

As he was passing the bank, he was struck by the unusual brightness of the light inside; stepping up to the window, he peered through and discovered the figure of a man kneeling before the open safe.

"Robbing!" he exclaimed, and springing to the front door, turned the knob; the door was fast; he turned and started around the corner toward the rear of the bank; the gate leading to the yard was unfastened, and passing through he saw a back window wide open; catching his breath, he placed his revolver in a handy position, and climbing through the window, dashed into the counting-room. There stood the open safe, but the robber had fled. He dashed through the private office and committee room, but they were empty too; then he hurried to the window, jumped, and had just alighted on the brick walk when a stern voice said:

"Ha! we've got you at it. Surrender!"

"The burglar!" gasped Huckleberry, "I saw him in there! He escaped through this window; quick, or he'll get away!"

"Too thin!" sneered the constable; "you're the burglar; these gentlemen saw you at it!"

As the constable alluded to these gentlemen, there stepped into sight Mr. Griggs, Levi and Google Slinker; Huckleberry was aghast and knew not what to say, while there played around Levi's mouth a sardonic smile of triumph.

Mr. Griggs opened the bank door with a private key, and Huckleberry was led inside by the constable.

"Search him!" suggested Levi, and to Huckleberry's astonishment the constable took from his pocket a roll of bills with the bank's binder on them; Huckleberry could say nothing; he was struck dumb.

"Maybe ~~it~~ wasn't you after all," sneered the constable.

"It wasn't," hotly returned the youth. "I was just passing."

"Then maybe you can prove an *alibi*," and the constable grinned.

"I can."

"Well, then, where did you pass the night up to this time?"

"I was at——"

Huckleberry stopped, a look of horror slowly stealing over his face; for the sake of Maud's fair name he dared not speak; they might brand him for life, but he could not tell.

"Where were you?"

"I shall not tell," he said, firmly.

"Of course not—you dare not."

Huckleberry dared not, it was only too true; he bent his head, and sank into a chair with a groan.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT ON BAIL.

LEVI GRIGGS gloated over the picture of the distressed Huckleberry, sitting, crushed and sorrowful, in a chair beside the table; he thanked his stars that Huckleberry could not or would not prove where he had spent the evening, as it strengthened the case against him; but where could Huckleberry have been? Levi's puzzlings over the query were fruitless.

In his mind the prisoner, for such he was, ran over the events of the evening, and sought to read aright the chain of circumstances which had placed him in his present position; where had the man whom he had seen fled to? And how chanced his arch enemy in the spot? He looked into Levi's evil, exultant face, and thought:

"He knows who did this! But Mr. Griggs——ah, he dared not suspect a man of his reputation."

The constable, to show his authority, deprived Huckleberry of his revolver, and threatened to use it on him if he made any movement toward escape.

Huckleberry thought of the mysterious note; he could not use it without dragging Maud into the affair; how the money came in his pocket he could easily explain; it had been put there by Levi. Of that he was sure.

But he could prove nothing; that seemed always his misfortune.

"I am innocent," he thought, "and surely they can do me no harm."

But as his excitement subsided, and he could look coolly at the whole affair, he saw in how bad a position he was really placed; he thought of the *Queen*; how could she go without him?

He turned to the constable.

"I want some information," he said; "you have me under arrest?"

"Yes."

"Is that strictly legal; is it not necessary to have a warrant?"

"Not when such gentlemen as Mr. Griggs and his son bring such a charge as this against you, and you are caught in the act."

"I shall sue you for false imprisonment," said Huckleberry.

"Ha—ha!" laughed the constable. "I'm safe there. Mr. Griggs takes his oath that he saw you robbing the safe, and the whole burden of proving it rests with him."

This Huckleberry plainly saw.

He was in a trap!

"Where did you meet Mr. Griggs?" he asked, at the same time looking towards the trio.

"About a block from here. I had been out to a wedding party, and was on my way home when I heard footsteps; presently up came Mr. Griggs, and said somebody was robbing the bank; back I came, and caught you just jumping from the window."

"And, sir," said Huckleberry, sharply, addressing Mr. Griggs, "where did *you* spend the early part of this evening? Can you prove an *alibi*?"

Mr. Griggs grew pale, and was evidently discomfited by this direct question; he was about to falter out some reply, when Levi said:

"Don't be in a hurry, young jail-bird; he'll answer all these questions when you're examined before the squire."

Huckleberry dropped his head, and became buried in thought, which lasted until long after the break of day; during this time the trio of accusers sat and conversed in low tones.

"You understand, both of you?" said Slinker.

"Yes."

"Well, get it all fixed good in your minds, so as not to get tripped up when we get afore the squire."

"All right," and Levi rubbed his hands with glee, and said, in a gleeful whisper: "We've got 'im this time and no mistake. Who'd ever have thought of its having turned out this way! We've got the money and we've got him. Couldn't be better—couldn't be better!"

The street door of the bank was open, and an early riser going to work, seeing it, stepped inside out of curiosity, and hearing a meager outline of the case, forgot his work and hurried away to spread the news.

One of these fellows kindly consented to go to the *Queen* and send Dick to him.

Huckleberry was in a strait; he now needed a friend, somebody to advise and counsel him; a month before he would have sent instantly for Mr. Marsland; but that gentleman had acted coolly of late, there was between them a sort of gulf whose nature was unknown to Huckleberry, but which he clearly felt; should he send for him now?

His pride said no, plumply and unmistakably; but to whom else could he send? None in the wide world.

Dick came, and when he heard it all, he shook his fist at Levi, and under his breath declared it was all his doings, but that he would square the account with interest.

To Mr. Marsland's house Dick went, and aroused that gentleman; Maude and the rest of the family, alarmed by the early call, also arose, and were in the parlor as soon as Mr. Marsland.

Maud's face grew deadly pale as she heard the story, while Mr. Marsland expressed grief and sorrow, yet very little sympathy, for the evidence, even as heard from Dick's partial mouth, was condemning.

"Papa," said Maud, "you'll help him clear of this, won't you?"

"If he is guilty, my dear, he must suffer," said Mr. Marsland, in reply. "I would not raise a finger to stay the course of punishment."

"But, papa, he is not guilty," said Maud, earnestly. "The arrest took place at a quarter of two."

"I know it; what of that?"

A flush suffused Maud's face, her lips trembled, she was confused.

Mr. Marsland was going.

"Papa, do not turn your back on him; he is not guilty, and *I know it!*"

"She knows it," mused Mr. Marsland, as he silently left the house. "How can she be so positive?"

They found Huckleberry in the bank. Going apart with Mr. Marsland, Huckleberry told him the whole story, and indirectly intimated that the Griggs' knew more about it than they would own.

"Huckleberry, I am sorry to see you try to cast suspicion on a gentleman of Mr. Griggs' standing, for it weakens your own case; say nothing of that kind before the squire. You say you had not been on the premises three minutes when you were arrested; all then that is necessary is to prove exactly where you were up to that time. Can you do it?"

"I cannot," was the frank reply.

"Ah!" and Mr. Marsland's voice grew cold and suspicious; "then you must accept the consequences."

"I will," said Huckleberry. "But, Mr. Marsland, I am innocent; they say I am to be examined before the squire and then committed for trial. If I am put in jail, a combination of circumstances ruins me forever. Mr. Marsland, you told me to seek you if I ever needed a friend; I have done so; do not let them put me in jail; give me a chance to ferret out this mystery and save myself."

A cold reply was on the gentleman's lips, when the earnest words of Maud arose in his mind:

"He is not guilty; *I know it!*"

He paused. "I'll do all I can," he said; and leaving the bank he made his word good by arousing the squire and getting him to open his office at once.

Huckleberry was taken before him, and Mr. Griggs gave his testimony.

He had accompanied Levi on board of the *Antelope* and had spent the evening in looking over

her books; the examination had been a protracted one, and it was nearly half-past one when they left for home, accompanied by Slinker, who was going up to the house to keep Levi company going back; in passing the bank he had noticed the light as being unusually brilliant; had gained a point where he could see inside, and saw Huckleberry kneeling before the open safe.

He was running for help, not having any firearms about him, when he met the constable; they returned, found Levi and Slinker on guard at the back gate, and entered the yard just as the prisoner was leaping from the window.

A package of the money had been found on his person.

"Did you find all that is missing?" inquired the squire.

"No."

"How do you account for that?"

"He must have had an accomplice who escaped before we came, after giving the alarm to the prisoner."

"That will do," and Mr. Griggs, stepped to one side, making room for Levi and Slinker, who substantiated his story in every respect.

"What have you to say?" and the squire turned to Huckleberry.

"Simply that I am innocent," was the answer, proudly holding up his head.

"You are committed to answer on trial at the next term," said the squire. "Constable, remove your prisoner."

Huckleberry looked at Mr. Marsland.

"One minute," said the gentleman. "Can he be released on bail?"

"He *can*," said the squire, emphasizing his reply, as much as to say that he would hardly consider it prudent.

"What amount of bail is required?"

"Five thousand dollars."

Mr. Marsland hesitated; it was a heavy risk to take; Huckleberry saw his indecision, and standing proudly erect he folded his arms, and his look bade defiance to the world: a glance into his honest face:

"I'll become his surety," said Mr. Marsland, and the bond was drawn up, signed and witnessed, and Huckleberry was free to go; he left the office in company with Mr. Marsland; a great crowd had by this time congregated, and many in it were stanch friends of the young pilot, and when they saw him step through the doorway unaccompanied by the officers of the law, they gave him three rousing cheers.

Huckleberry could not repress a glad smile, for it showed him once more how the popular mind was affected toward himself.

With many expressions of thanks to his benefactor, Huckleberry parted with him and went on board the *Queen* with Dick Larkin, who had rushed up as soon as Mr. Marsland parted with him.

Huckleberry felt grateful also to the squire for disposing of the case at so much inconvenience to himself, as it enabled him to take the *Queen* to Railroadville, instead of being compelled to trust her in other hands.

Jemmy and Dick were highly indignant over Huckleberry's arrest, and did not hesitate to charge it on the Griggs'.

"It was them as was a-robbing of the bank," said Dick. "They fixed it on you somehow; didn't you recognize the chap you saw in front of the safe?"

"No, but I thought afterward that it looked something like Slinker."

"Then it was him," said Dick, in a decided tone of conviction. "Anyhow, you're not in jail; the sessions of court is a long way off, and we'll prove your innocence afore then."

"I hope so," said Huckleberry, gloomily, for the prospects of doing so seemed very slim. "All hands to places; it's nearly time to start."

He paced the deck, his eyes downcast, wondering if each person who came on board thought him guilty; and then he thought of Maud; would she remember the hour and *know* that he was innocent? If so, he felt his spirits rise; he cared little for the opinion of the outside world; for her to have considered him guilty would have been the worst blow of all, for he had never forgotten the day when, ragged and dirty, shunned by all, called a thief and a vagabond, she had put her hand on his shoulder, had spoken kindly to him; since which time he had always paid her a silent but devoted homage, for the first sympathy ever extended to the poor-house brat, the scapegrace of Lakeport.

"Did they let him go?" Maud eagerly inquired of her father, when he returned to breakfast.

"Yes."

"Then he proved his innocence?"

"No; he was released to appear for trial at the fall term of court, on my becoming surety for him."

"You're a good papa to get him free from jail," said Maud; "and I'm sure that he will prove he is not guilty."

Maud had it at her tongue's end to tell her father all that had occurred the previous night, but maidenly modesty cut it short. Many a time that day, when alone, she would resolve to acquaint her father with all, and as many times, when the opportunity presented, she faltered and failed to carry out her purpose, and finally retired at night without having done so.

Her room contained a sofa, and after she closed the door she flung herself on this and gave herself up to her reflections.

"I must get up and go to bed," she thought, as the clock struck eleven, "and fasten my window; I must not forget that."

But she did not arise from the sofa then, and a few minutes later she unconsciously drifted into slumber's dreamy land."

The streets of Lakeport were dark and deserted; it was after midnight; through a back street three figures skulked, and came to a halt at the rear of Mr. Marsland's grounds, which ran from street to street, that at the back being recently laid out, and as yet had not been built upon.

They opened the gate and entered the grounds, advanced until near the house, and then halted.

"That's the window," said one, pointing at Maud's. "Now, Gadding, go ahead. You've got the chloroform?"

"Yes."

"Dose her heavy; keep quiet as a mouse, and when she's caved pass her out of the window."

Gadding crept forward and entered the room without disturbing its inmate.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUCKLEBERRY TO THE RESCUE.

It was the day succeeding the midnight interview between Mr. Griggs and Levi, near the close of which they had been startled by the latter seeing, or imagining he saw, a dark figure glide swiftly through the hall past the door.

The *Antelope* had no sooner left Lakeport than Levi went up to the pilot-house to have a talk with Slinker in regard to two projects—robbing the bank and abducting Maud.

"Can I count on you?" asked Levi, after having unfolded his villainous plots.

"Now, just see here," said Slinker. "I'll just explain how I stand. Money 'll, if there's enough of it, hire me to do almost anything; but I can tell you this: I don't go to poking my head into the lion's mouth to do your business unless I get paid well for it. And, another thing, I ain't a goin' to be made a scapegoat for either of you; it's hand in hand—all in the same boat—or not at all."

"In the bank business there'll be three of us—the old man, myself, and you; it's as easy as pie getting into the building, and a jimmy 'll take the rickety old lock off the safe in a hurry."

"I get one-third of the swag, I suppose?" remarked Slinker.

Levi winced; he expected a big haul, and did not wish to divide up that way; he then sought to compromise, but finding he could not make a better bargain, accepted Slinker's terms.

"Now for the gal," said Slinker, when the other matter had been satisfactorily adjusted. "What are you carrying her off for? To force her to have you?"

"No."

"I thought you had a good show as it is."

"So I have."

"What's your reason, then?"

"I haven't made up my mind. Maybe for a reward."

"Oh!" and Slinker opened his eyes. "How much would her dad plank down?"

"Five thousand, safe enough," was the reply.

"Of that you will get a good share, or will get well paid if I rescue the girl."

"Rescue her?" and Slinker knitted his brows together. "What do you mean?"

"Well, the girl disappears, is gone some days, and her old man is nearly crazy. I take on badly as her accepted lover; the old man promises to give her to me right away if I can find her. I suddenly dash in on her keeper, who, by the way, expects my coming, and falls an easy victim. I bear her home in triumph—wedding cards—marriage—money, lots of it."

"You'll do," was the rather doubtful complimentary remark of Slinker. "You don't want to be seen in the affair, then?"

"Of course not."

"Neither do I, because she knows me by sight. She must be carried off and kept in confinement by some one she don't know. By thunder, I've hit it—there's Gadding."

"Who is he?"

"I never mentioned his name, that's a fact. Why, Gadding's the fellow who put the torpedoes in the *Queen's* coal."

"Is he safe?"

"If you make it to his interest."

"I'll do that."

"Then he's just the man you want. How much will you pay him for the job?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"All right. I'll fix it with him. Where'll you take the girl to keep?"

"You know the old hut we came across that week we got stuck in Barren Island Channel?"

"Yes."

"I've been thinkin' of that."

"Bully!" exclaimed Slinker. "The very place. We'll consider it settled, then, and I'll attend to the details."

"Both jobs must be done inside of a week."

"All right," was the answer. "There'll be no trouble about that."

Once safely fastened to the pier at Railroadville, Slinker hurried away in search of Gadding, but could not find him. The next day he had better success, and soon arranged matters with him, the price agreed upon being *three hundred dollars*.

Slinker laughed in his sleeve over this bit of sharp practice, and returned to the boat elated with his success. The same day Levi bought a small boat, and gave it in charge of Gadding, who was to row to the channel back of Barren Island and find the hut. After dark on the day agreed upon for the abduction, he was to pull to Lakeport, board the *Antelope*, abduct Maud and carry her back to the hut in the boat.

Old man Griggs sauntered on board of the *Antelope* on the evening agreed on; but Gadding did not put in an appearance, though they patiently waited for him until midnight. The fact was that, being supplied with money to lay in a store of food, he had taken care to expend the greater part of it in whisky, and, forgetful of his engagement, he lay on the floor of the hut at the time, kicking up his heels, roaring drunk.

"He won't be here at all," grumbled Levi.

"I'm afraid not," said Slinker. Then, speaking low: "Why not change the order of things, and do the bustin' of the bank to-night?"

This was quickly decided upon, and, concealing a jimmy and several other burglarious instruments about his person, Slinker announced himself ready, and they left the boat and stole up the deserted street.

The sash was quickly forced after they reached the yard in the rear, and Slinker and Levi entered the building, leaving the old man as watch outside.

Levi had described the safe as a rickety affair, and such it proved, for in less than half an hour Slinker had forced the doors open. He had commenced work a few minutes of one, and it was exactly a quarter past that hour when he stood ready to attack the thin wire door between them and the money.

The door was smashed, and Slinker grabbed at the packages of money with an exultant cry, passing them over to Levi, as well as stuffing his own pockets.

Old man Griggs saw Huckleberry approaching, though not recognizing him then, and gave the alarm, and then screened himself in a deep doorway on the opposite side of the street.

The instant of the warning Levi bolted, but Slinker was more reckless; the sight of the money bound him to the spot.

"One more grab," he muttered, as he thrust a roll of bills in his breast; and then he heard the knob turn, knew he had been discovered, and darted toward the open window. He heard footsteps and shrunk back, allowing Huckleberry to pass him and rush into the banking-room, when, unheard, he dropped out of the window.

"It's Huckleberry," he informed Levi.

The elder Griggs was getting away as fast as his legs could carry him, when he encountered the constable. Excited, anxious to divert suspicion from himself, unconscious really of what he said, he gasped:

"The bank—burglars!" and then followed the constable toward the bank. Levi and Slinker stood at the gate, and both turned pale when the constable rushed upon them. Then a thought shot through Levi's head, and he hissed:

"Quick! He's in there yet. He'll come out soon. There he is."

The constable bounced in, and Huckleberry was a prisoner; the elder Griggs took the cue from a few hurried words of Levi's; the latter soon after found a chance to slip the package into the accused lad's pocket; the money they had themselves they slyly concealed, and while sitting there watching dejected Huckleberry, they concocted the story put in evidence.

Thus fortune worked into their hands; the result was the cause of much rejoicing on Levi's

part, and so many times did he drink over it with Slinker, after the *Antelope* was under way, that by the time they reached Railroadville he was as drunk as a lord, and had to be carried to bed by Slinker, from which he did not emerge until they were about to return.

By this time the greater part of his jubilation had subsided, and, not satisfied with the harm he had done Huckleberry, he cursed Mr. Marsland for giving his bail and thus securing his liberty. Nothing would have given the villain so much delight as to see Huckleberry behind prison bars, and then be allowed to stand outside and taunt him.

During the day Huckleberry had snatched a few hours' sleep, and fresh and rosy took his place at the wheel, and there remained during the return trip to Lakeport.

At nine o'clock he was debating in his mind whether to go to bed or to the grounds of the Marslands.

"The danger may be all over," he mused. "But I guess I'll go; it won't do any harm." And so, at eleven o'clock, he vaulted the fence and, stretched out beneath a dense clump of lilacs, took up his lonely vigil. Everything was so still and quiet that at last he unconsciously slept.

At the time he drifted into dreamland a small boat approached the *Antelope*, and a man soon after climbed the steamer's deck.

"Is that you Gadding?" asked Slinker, who had hastened outside as soon as he heard the noise occasioned by this feat.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you come last night?"

"I couldn't," was all the reply he received.

"Never mind, it's all right," said Slinker, graciously, at the same time affectionately placing his hand on his pocket. "Ready for biz to-night?"

"Yes."

They reached the grounds as already mentioned, and Gadding gained entrance to Maud's room unheard by her, unheard by Huckleberry, who still slumbered.

Gadding could see the outline of the bed, and stepped to its side, only to find it empty. A disappointed oath still trembled with utterance, when he saw a dark form on the sofa. Softly he sneaked along, made a dive, fastened one hand across Maud's mouth, and with the other firmly held a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, to her nose.

Rudely awakened, Maud opened her eyes, saw the burly figure above her, and, trembling with terror, would have shrieked loudly, but for the brawny hand that stilled her voice.

She became motionless, and Gadding at once thrust the handkerchief into his pocket, then picked up the limp form and softly crossed to the widow.

"All right," he softly called.

Levi and Slinker went beneath the window, and prepared to receive the unconscious form; Maud was lowered into their arms, and they were holding her thus, when suddenly she moved and uttered a piercing shriek. Gadding had been in too much of a hurry, and had not allowed her to inhale enough chloroform.

"The devil!" growled Slinker, and turning his fingers around her throat, began choking her into silence.

A rustle in the bushes startled them, and then they saw a dimly-outlined figure bounding towards them, and then Huckleberry's voice rang sternly out:

"You infernal villains, you'll suffer for this outrage?"

"Thunder!" ejaculated Levi, in accents of alarm, and let go of Maud; Slinker did the same, and the girl fell heavily to the ground, the rank growth of grass, however, preventing serious injuries.

With a cry of anger, Huckleberry sprang upon Levi, and hit him a stunning blow that knocked him off his feet.

"Lie there, you hound! I know you, Levi Griggs; and now for you!" and he sprang toward Slinker, who stood beneath the window. The ruffian would have received severe treatment at the angry Huckleberry's hands, had not Gadding at that moment leaped from the window, striking with his full weight on Huckleberry's head and shoulders, felling him to the ground, more than half stunned.

"Cut for it," cried Gadding. "There's no use stoppin' here. The whole house is astir now; come, cap," and dragging Levi to his feet, the trio ran like deers toward the rear gate, sped down the road, and were lost to sight ere Huckleberry crawled to his feet, his heart full of chagrin at not having captured any of the villains.

Maud had also arisen to her feet, and stood trembling and panting over her recent danger.

"This is the danger that threatened you last night, Miss Marsland," he said. "Thank God, I was the means of saving you!"

"Oh—oh—oh!" sobbed Maud, and then Huckleberry saw her about to fall, and caught her in his arms.

Crash, went Maud's door, a heavy footstep flew across the floor, and Mr. Marsland's head appeared at the window; seeing the two figures, he was beside them in an instant, and was about to seize Huckleberry by the throat, when the latter exclaimed:

"The danger's past, Mr. Marsland; it's only Huckleberry; Miss Marsland has fainted; can you open the door?"

Mrs. Marsland opened the front door, and Maud being taken in her father's arms, was carried inside and laid on a sofa.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DESPERATE WORK.

HUCKLEBERRY having followed Mr. Marsland in, Mrs. Marsland fled the scene, only to quickly return, having in the meantime slipped on a morning wrapper.

It took but a short time for Maud to recover; her first question was for her rescuer.

"He is here, safe and sound," was her father's reply. "And now," his voice filled with surprise, amazement and doubt, "what has happened? How came you, sir, in my grounds?"

"I knew, sir, that your daughter was in danger of being abducted, and I meant to save her if I could. I screened myself among the lilacs outside, and must have dropped to sleep, for all at once I came to myself with a shriek ringing in my ears, and saw your daughter in the hands of two men. I rushed out, they took to their heels, and that's all of it."

Then Maud related how she had carelessly fallen asleep, leaving her window open, and how, rudely awakened, she had been prevented from crying out, and how she had drifted into unconsciousness under the influence of the chloroform.

Mr. Marsland was thoughtful for a few minutes and then he said:

"You knew that this was going to take place?"

"Yes, sir," replied Huckleberry.

"Who did it?"

"I don't know."

"You knew it was going to be done, yet don't know by whom?" and Mr. Marsland glanced at Huckleberry with looks of suspicion. "There is something more here than you explained. Now, sir, what is it? I demand an answer?"

"It was to have been done last night," began Huckleberry, and then, halting, colored deeply and looked at Maud; Mr. Marsland noticed this, and turning to his daughter, looked his desire for an explanation.

It was a struggle, but Maud saw an open course was best, and said:

"He was in my room last night until half-past one or later; that is why I knew that he could not have broken into the bank."

"In your room!" gasped Mr. Marsland; then turning fiercely on Huckleberry, he exclaimed: "You young scoundrel! You ungrateful hound! You—"

"Hold, sir!" and Huckleberry drew himself up proudly. "You have not heard all."

"Then let me hear it, for God's sake! Explain this mystery."

"Here, sir, is a letter I received last night."

Mr. Marsland read it, and then as Huckleberry had done, looked it over and over in search of some name or address.

"Well," he said, looking up when he had finished his scrutiny.

Huckleberry then went over in detail his actions of the night before, not even hiding the few words he had spoken to Maud as he stood beside her bed.

"And these villains! Did neither of you recognize them?"

Huckleberry remained silent for a short while; then said:

"I wish to accuse no man wrongly, but although I could not see his face, I am certain one of them was Levi Griggs."

"Could you swear to it?"

"I could not."

"What motive could he have in abducting Maud?"

"I can't see any at all."

"Neither can I. No, it could not have been Levi Griggs; I'm assured of that, for as I understand it, he and Maud agree very well indeed; and I've never had any reason to think him unprincipled."

"You don't know him, sir," said Huckleberry.

"Be careful," warned Mr. Marsland. "Remember your own position before you try to throw mud on anybody."

"Papa, that's cruel!" exclaimed Maud, quick to see the slight put on Huckleberry's unknown origin.

"He'll excuse me, then," was her father's return. "But what reason have you for thinking that he would do anything wrong?"

"I'll tell you, sir," and Huckleberry recounted everything from the time when he had thrashed Levi for insulting Sallie Wood, up to the finding of the money in his pocket the night before.

"It must have been put there by one of the three," said Huckleberry. "You are satisfied that I did not break into the safe now, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Then isn't there as good a case against him as could be made without actually seeing him do these things?"

"I'm afraid to admit the truth of that," replied Mr. Marsland. "But now you had better go. Breathe not a word of last night to a living soul, and say nothing of what occurred to-night. This shall all be investigated thoroughly."

With a low bow, Huckleberry hurried from the room, and started toward the boat, while Maud retired to another part of the house, and soon the wonted quietness fell over the place of the late exciting scene.

The trio skulked along and hurried as fast they dared until they reached the *Antelope*, where they immediately commenced conversing earnestly on what was best to be done.

"He recognized me," said Levi, in tones of alarm. "I must leave here to-night."

"Nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all!" he continued in the same strain. "Steam must be got up at once, and I must be landed on the Canadian shore."

"Nothing of the kind," said Slinker, who was the coolest of the lot. "He may be sure he knew you, but it was so dark he couldn't swear to it to save his life! Stick to the ground, man; to run away would be to acknowledge your guilt. No, you stay here; the only difference is this, you've got to get him out of the way, right off."

"But how?" exclaimed Levi. "He'll get help and come right down here."

"He'll do nothin' of the kind. He may tell Marsland that he suspects you; what of that? Your word's as good as his'n any day; and who could give a reason for your abductin' the gal?"

"That's sound sense," said Gadding. "You're all right as it stands, but he must be sent over the river."

"And I know how to do it," said Slinker, suddenly.

"How?"

"Never mind. Bring a rope and a saw and a little crowbar."

These implements secured, they left the boat and began ascending the short, steep hill that led from the docks to the main street.

The road had here been built right on the side of the bank or bluff on which the village was situated; on one side of the road a level-faced bank rose up, while the other had been formed by building up a wall from the lower level, so that at one spot there was a clear descent of forty or fifty feet.

At the outside of the road was a footpath made of wood, that projected out beyond the wall; the walk was braced by light timbers running from the outer edge of the walk and resting against the wall ten or twelve feet below the level of the walk.

Arriving at the steepest part, Slinker took the crowbar and speedily pried up a number of the boards; then fastening the rope about him, he bade his companions lower him through the breach he had made; he carried the saw with him and severed three of the braces; then being drawn up he sawed in two several of the cross beams of the walk and then declared the job completed.

"To test it, however, he placed his foot on the weakened place, and drew it quickly back at finding it shake and give way immediately."

"It'll hardly hold its own weight now," he said. "Let him once step squarely on it and it'll land him down below with a broken neck."

He laid loosely back the planks he had taken up, and then their devilish trap prepared they crossed the road and laid themselves at full length in the gutter and waited for Huckleberry's coming.

They heard his coming at last.

Never dreaming of danger from such a source, Huckleberry stepped upon the plank, every footstep clear and distinct.

He was within a few feet of the trap when he suddenly halted and laid his hand on his revolver; it was caused by the loud chuckle of Slinker, who was gloating with delight over his own ingenious villainy.

Huckleberry waited a minute and looked sharply around, but saw nothing of the three dark

forms in the gutter on the opposite side of the road.

Another step forward—another, and he felt the pathway sinking beneath his feet; he tried to jump back, but the work had been too thoroughly done, and once started the walk descended like a falling shot.

A cry of horror burst from his lips, and he made a wild clutch for something to sustain him; he got hold of one of the loosened planks and it gave way; he grasped this way and that, struck the stone wall, flung up his hands, and laid hold of the coping on top.

His back was toward the wall, and his elevated hands gave him but slight hold, and that strained him awfully; he could not hold on long; he could not change his position to get a fresh hold.

He groaned in anguish of heart, for imagination pictured up the fatal fall, the mangled corpse.

He called for help.

An awful chill ran through his frame as he heard voices above him in the road.

"We must stop his voice," he heard, and then came a swish through the air as Slinker swung the iron bar upward and then brought it down on Huckleberry's fingers, which, crushed and quivering and strengthless, unclasped, and—Huckleberry fell.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAND TO HAND WITH DEATH.

THE two villains, cowards that they were, no sooner saw Huckleberry disappear, than they took to their heels, glancing fearfully around, afraid that there might be lurking near some unseen witness of their dastardly work.

They reached the fork where the road branches, one continuation running to the *Antelope's* pier, the other to the *Queen's*; they had gone but a few feet down the former when clear and distinct they heard a cry for help.

Their cheeks blanched; had their attempt failed? If so, better that it had never been done.

They had halted short and listened.

"Help!"

"Curses on him!" hissed Slinker. "It seems impossible to kill him. Shall we go back?"

"No—no!" exclaimed Levi. "Let's get away from here at once. Oh, God! that I should have consented to go into the thing at all."

"Shut up!" growled Slinker, "shut up, or I'll brain you!" and there was enough savageness and meaning in both words and tone to effectually silence Levi.

"Will you go back with me, Gadding, and put a bullet in him?" asked Slinker.

"No, because somebody else'll be sure to hear them screeches of his'n."

"Hist!" exclaimed Slinker, before Gadding had hardly finished. "To cover! There's somebody running up from the *Queen*!"

Crouching low, they sneaked along until they reached a spot where they could not readily be observed, and there waited until the person seen by Slinker had passed; and then, deeming prudence the better part of valor, they scurried along at a rapid pace until they were on board the *Antelope*, when, after a few hurried instructions, Gadding entered his boat and pulled away.

Levi Griggs was beside himself with fear, and would not have lost a minute in fleeing the town had not it been for Slinker, who, finding persuasion and reasoning fruitless, finally resorted to force and knocked his employer down, with the remark:

"You infernal fool! You shan't skip the town; that would prove your guilt, and they'd be sure to capture you. No, sir, we're in the same boat, and we sink or swim together. You understand me?" he added, significantly, as Levi rose to his feet, too frightened and too much overcome by his cowardly fears to resent even by word the knock down given him by Slinker, who forthwith conducted him to his stateroom, and himself crawled into the spare bunk, in doing which he took care to display the butt of a revolver that protruded from his hip pocket.

"You try any skedadlin' and it'll be worse for you," he remarked, in a tone of warning; "and if anybody should come, you remember this—we've been on board ever since sundown."

Harassed and tormented by his fears of detection, afraid of the man in his stateroom, Levi passed the time that intervened until daylight in as much of a hell on earth as a man can conceive, nor was he free from trembling and terror until the lines were cast off at starting time.

And Huckleberry?

From his cries for help his enemies became aware that he had not at any rate been instantly killed.

When he felt himself really going, he gave up all hope, for he knew how great the distance was

and how little chance there was of his reaching the bottom without breaking his neck.

But once again fortune was with him, or, as he afterward said when glancing back over this period of his history, it seemed as if God saved him to defeat the wickedness of his enemies.

Fortune or Providence then, saved his life in this manner; Slinker had sawed in two the braces that supported the walk, leaving projecting from the wall the lower part of each brace, which, in conjunction with the wall made a jaw or fork, something like the letter V; in falling, Huckleberry scraped downward close to the face of the wall, and suddenly brought up in the angle of the jaw formed by brace and wall; for a few minutes he lay motionless and breathless, for the sudden shock had knocked the wind clean out of him.

Recovering his breath and having silently waited until he heard the footsteps of his enemies no more, he made an endeavor to change his position, but the only result was to wrench from him an agonized cry as he attempted to use his crushed fingers, for he was wedged tightly in the jam.

He struggled a little without using his hands, and to his horror he started the foot of the brace slightly from its hold.

His face blanched, and ceasing all motion, he remained perfectly quiet for a couple of minutes, when a severe cramp caused him to move sharp and quick.

Crack—crack! scarcely audible, but awfully significant.

The brace was slowly giving way at its fastening; he could feel it go little by little; oh, God! if it should break loose he must go down the rest of that steep descent, and—nothing could interpose to save him.

He could do nothing to assist himself, he must have help; he thought of Dick Larkins, whose duty it was on watch, and wondered if the brave-hearted fellow could hear his voice.

It was then that he raised the cry for help heard by his enemies; and Dick Larkins, standing at the shore rail of the *Queen* and wondering what kept her captain away so late, also heard the cry; and when it came again, he aroused Ben Ruggles, and bidding him take the deck, grabbed a lantern and hastened up the road.

"Help!"

The cry came again just after Dick had darted past the point where the trio lay concealed at the fork of the road; and when he heard it again Dick's heart jumped into his throat, for he thought he recognized Huckleberry's voice, and in reply he shouted;

"Ay—ay! where are you?"

"Look out for the walk!" cried Huckleberry, who knew who it was that spoke; and the warning was timely, for rushing along as he did, Dick would more than likely have gone headlong into the hole; as it was he approached it carefully, and bending down, asked:

"What's the matter? How are you fixed?"

"The walk gave way, and let me down; I'm caught in one of the braces and that is giving way, slowly but surely. It can't last long, so be quick!"

"I'll come down to you."

"No—no, a rope!" cried Huckleberry. "A rope, or I'm a dead man."

Dick jumped to his feet and arranged his hands about his mouth to make a sort of trumpet, so as to carry the sound further, and yelled:

"Boat ahoy! Hey, Ben!"

"Ay—ay!" came back through the stillness of the night.

"Get a heaving line and come up the road as fast as you can. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Then hurry, for the captain's in danger."

Ben Ruggles needed nothing more to stimulate him to the greatest exertion, and seizing a heaving line he bounded on the dock, after stopping one second to arouse Jemmy, and then sped up the hill, and panting, out of breath, he reached Dick's side.

Dick seized the rope and made a running noose in it, and put it under his arms, then clambered over the edge of the wall, bidding Ben to pull hard and watch close for his life.

Crack—crack! faint, yet loud in their accent of warning.

Huckleberry shivered, not with fear of death itself, but at the awful suspense which preceded it; he was calm and collected, and coolly calculated his chances of escape.

Crack—crack!

Still going; the brace began to give perceptibly, and that it was fast weakening he well knew; and also that at any second it might break loose entirely, and go down to join the wreck of the path below.

He was forced to move, and a warning snap broke like a knell of death on his ear.

"Hurry, Dick!" he cried.

"I'm a-comin'," was the reply; and even then Dick was swaying in his descent.

He reached Huckleberry, and clasped him in his arms just as the brace was wrenched from its last supporting nail; and with a shudder they both heard it crash on the planks below; and then they shuddered again, and called out in accents of fear, for they began to descend:

"Hold on!" cried Dick.

"I can't," said Ben. "You're too heavy! Won't the rope reach bottom?"

"No!"

"I can't help it, for it's dragging me over!" wailed Ben; slowly he allowed the rope to slide through his hands, and it was nearly all played out, when Jemmy, half dressed, came rushing up.

An instant's glance showed him how matters stood, and seizing hold of the rope with Ben, the order of things was reversed, and Dick and his burden began to ascend; Huckleberry was indeed a burden, Dick finding it necessary to uphold his entire weight, for Huckleberry could not use his hands at all.

It was an awful tax on his strength, but Dick held on like a hero, and presently they reached the level of the road, and Jemmy, catching hold of Huckleberry, lifted him up, and stood him on his feet, though he could hardly stand, so weakened was he by the danger and excitement he had undergone.

Coiling up the rope, the quartette started for the boat, Jemmy and Dick giving Huckleberry their support; once on board the *Queen* Huckleberry's hands were attended to, and an awful sight they were, jammed between the rock by the iron bar as they had been; they were cut and lacerated, and bruised beyond description, and the pain was agonizing; but the sufferer bore that, and the increased pain of dressing and washing them, like a hero.

When the pain had somewhat subsided Huckleberry told them how the accident had occurred, and Dick promptly said:

"That 'ere walk never give way of itself. It was a trap they fixed for you."

"I think so, too," said the victim of these devilish machinations. "But how am I to prove it? The truth must conquer at last, and until it does God help me to baffle all their hideous plans."

He went to bed at Jemmy's solicitation, and enjoyed a few hours' sleep, which was more than Levi Griggs did; in the morning he was up betimes, and took the *Queen* out of the pier, or at least Dick did under his directions, for Huckleberry's hands were so wrapped up that he could not take hold of the spokes of the wheel.

Shortly afterward a figure darkened the doorway of the pilot house, and looking up he saw Mr. Marsland.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOW IN THE HALL AGAIN.

"GOOD-MORNING!"

"Good-morning, Mr. Marsland," returned Huckleberry.

"What is the matter?" and the gentleman glanced at Huckleberry's hands; "you look pale, too."

"I came near losing my life last night."

"How?" said the gentleman quickly, and then glanced at Dick as much as to say, "shall he hear?"

Huckleberry nodded his head slightly, and commencing at the point where he had started down the hill to the boat, gave Mr. Marsland a complete account of what had transpired, at hearing which the gentleman's face expressed sympathy and surprise, and then indignation toward the rascals who could so coolly plan and plot and lay traps for the destruction of a fellow creature.

"And this is the way you have been persecuted!" he exclaimed.

"It is," slowly said Huckleberry. "But it must all come out in due time; such villainy cannot always be concealed, and with that I must be satisfied."

"But I'm not!" exclaimed Mr. Marsland; "we must sift these mysteries to the bottom; such things must not be allowed to exist, for their existence is a shame to any community. Can you come below with me for a short time?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, and after giving Dick a few directions for his better guidance, Huckleberry preceded Mr. Marsland to the main deck and into his private office.

"Now," said Mr. Marsland, and his tone was stern and determined, "who do you think did this?"

Huckleberry for a minute was silent and then replied:

"Once, when I stated some suspicions of the Griggses, you would not listen, and in fact intimated that any such frankness of speech on my

part only blackened myself. But I think I showed you some grounds for suspecting Levi Griggs last night, and so will be perfectly frank now. When I struck down the man I supposed to be Griggs, I said something like 'I know you, Levi Griggs,' and he I am sure it was. He and his two companions fled; they would probably come to the *Antelope*. They knew I was away and must return to my boat. Judging that I could not swear to their identity, yet fearing I might circulate some story to direct public attention to them, they went to work and sawed the braces of the foot-path, expecting I would be killed by the fall; God's grace only saving me," said Huckleberry.

"I saw the walk was gone," said Mr. Marsland, "as I came down the hill. Well, it does seem the only solution, the one you have given, and though I am loath to suspect Levi, I am compelled to for the present. As to his father, I would as soon suspect myself as him."

Huckleberry winced, for he took this as a shot at himself.

"Very well, sir, time will tell; but there is one thing, sir, I know, and that is that Mr. Griggs feels animosity toward me who have never done him any harm; Mr. Marsland, for a long time I have thought this—that both father and son have some deep reason for hating me."

"What is it?"

"I don't know; I can't even conjecture; but the impression has forced itself gradually on me."

To this Mr. Marsland made no rejoinder, and after asking and being answered that the *Queen* would reach Railroadville in time for the train, he went forward and joined in conversation with a friend, Huckleberry returning to the pilot-house.

They passed the *Antelope* before the last landing was reached, and Slinker and Levi, from their pilot-house, saw Huckleberry in his; the last doubt as to what had become of him was thus solved in the minds of both, and while Slinker cursed and swore, Levi turned several shades paler, and exclaimed:

"There's no use trying! You can't kill him; he bears a charmed life."

"Charmed be d—d!" growled Slinker. "Before this I've tried to put him out of the way on your account, but now I shall try it on my own; and I'll succeed, too! he finished grimly.

At Railroadville Mr. Marsland took the train and came back in another that connected with the boats just before they left in the afternoon. On the cars with him was a rather roughly-dressed fellow, who looked something like a boatman, whose conversation, however, failed to accord with his general style, being that of an educated man.

As the train rushed into the depot they parted, and the stranger boarded the *Antelope*, while Mr. Marsland went on the *Queen*.

We will follow the stranger.

Once on board, he lounged near the gang-plank, and watched everybody who came and went, and took care to bestow many sharp, unseen glances on Slinker and Levi Griggs; but when Sandy Quirk passed in front of him to take the thrown-lines he started visibly, and a smile of grim satisfaction played for one instant about his firmly-set lips; he kept Quirk in sight after this, yet without attracting the other's attention.

The last intermediate landing had been left behind, and they were on the homestretch. Having nothing to do now until they reached Lakeport, Sandy took out his pipe, filled and lighted it, and then took a seat near the fore-castle hatchway, and puffed away in silence in the growing darkness.

The stranger sauntered near him, and producing a cigar, strode up to him with the remark:

"Give us a little fire."

Quirk passed over his pipe without a word, and taking a seat close beside him, the stranger coolly and slowly proceeded to take a light; he was purposely slow, and when Quirk impatiently turned to recover his pipe, the stranger kept on puffing, although he had a good light.

The strangeness of the action caused Quirk to glance at the other's face, and a vague feeling of something wrong struck him as he saw two eyes bent fixedly on him; then by the glow of cigar and pipe he scanned the face before him, while his own kept growing alarmed and pale, and finally, with a low oath, expressive of surprise and fear, he was about to spring to his feet, when the other uttered a low—

"Sh! Quiet, man, if you know what is for your good. You know me, I see?"

"Yes," faltered Quirk.

"Now listen," and the stranger sunk his voice to a low, but stern tone. "I am known in this rig as Tom Smith, and I am supposed to be an old steamboatman. I want your help; if you give it to me I'll let that old matter against you rest, but

"If you don't, or if you betray me, I'll hunt you down like a bloodhound."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Quirk, sullenly yet humbly.

"I want you to claim me as an old friend, a 'pal'; and if I am seen hanging around, explain it so to the captain of this craft; remember, I'm a desperado, a rough one, ready to do anything for money, and keen as the devil. Will you do this?"

"I s'pose I've got to," grumbled Quirk. "It's to my interest I s'pose."

"Decidedly."

"You're workin' up somethin'?"

"Yes."

"And if I does what yer says you don't want me, and won't give me away."

"That's it, exactly; you have my word for it."

"What's your lay?"

Smith, so called, bent his head a few minutes in thought; he wanted to go over the ground in his mind, and see how far it was necessary to trust his forced companion in the undertaking.

"Well," he said at last, "I'm on the lay to find out who attempted to abduct Marsland's daughter. Did you have any hand in it?"

"No, I didn't even know about it," said Quirk, and such was really the case, as though as great a villain as Slinker, who knew him to be such, the former lacked confidence in him, and told him no more than was necessary.

"Did young Griggs have a hand in it?"

"I don't know," but Quirk lied point blank.

"Very well," said Smith, who had really but little expectation of worming anything out of Quirk in this manner; "don't say any more about it just now, but remember what I told you, and act accordingly if you are a judge of what is good for your health," with which warning Smith moved away and took up an espionage on Levi's movements, without, however, giving that gentleman any cause for alarm.

After the boat landed, Levi went up the hill, followed by Smith, who never lost sight of him until he entered his father's house; after supper, Levi and Mr. Griggs repaired to his private room, and the latter at once exclaimed:

"Good God, Levi! what have you been doing? It has got around that somebody made an attempt to murder young Wood last night by sawing the path braces, and I have been expecting to hear your name connected with it. What did you do?" and Mr. Griggs showed how greatly agitated he was.

Levi was a great coward, as we all know, but at sight of his father's distress of mind, he put on a spirit of braggadocio, and loftily replied:

"Bah! old man, you'd be afraid of your shadow. Suppose things do go wrong once, what of that?"

"Sit down, Levi," said Mr. Griggs, himself sinking into a chair; "but first close the door."

Here was an opportunity for Levi to show his superiority over his father in point of courage, so he replied with affected carelessness:

"What's the good? I'm not afraid, although you seem to be," and sinking into a chair just opposite his father, he concluded with: "Now, old cock, go ahead with your chin music. Would you like to ask any questions?"

"Yes, about the abduction. What of it?"

Levi paused; was it the rustle of a dress he heard in the hall? He would not exhibit to his father any weakness by rising to shut the door; and so, as everything remained unalarming and noiseless, he replied, sinking his voice very low:

"It failed. That cursed Huckleberry was there and spoiled it all, and he recognized me; so when we skedaddled we made up our minds to fix him so that he couldn't blab, and we fixed the walk. He survived the fall, however; but it's plain he can't swear to who it was he knocked down—curses on him!—or we'd a heard from him before this."

"Levi, I'm afraid we're getting near the end of our rope."

"Why?"

"Your failures to put young Wood, or Huckleberry, out of the way has drawn public attention toward the matter. And Mr. Marsland won't rest satisfied until he finds out who tried to abduct Maud, you may be sure."

"Well," said Levi, brave when no danger was apparent, "suppose he doesn't rest easy. How's he going to find out? There's no one to give it away."

Mr. Griggs was silent for a long time, during which he nervously drummed his fingers on the desk.

Then Levi broke the silence by another request for money.

"What have you done with all you had—all that you took out of the bank safe?"

"Gambled!" was the one word of Levi's that explained all.

"You can't have any more."

"I must."

"Levi, for God's sake don't drive me crazy. Here is all that is left," and he flung the bills on the desk. Levi coolly pocketed it with:

"Well, I won't ask you for any more; I'll have plenty before long."

"Where from?"

"From Marsland."

"How?"

"I haven't given up abducting Maud yet; and I'll make him pay a round sum for her return, you can bet."

"How? What is your plan?"

"I hardly know; but the job'll be done inside of three days," said Levi, "and Huckleberry will be a corpse before a week goes by; he's getting dangerous to us all, and—how did he happen in Marsland's grounds? By Jinks!" and he jumped to his feet, "could the old woman have given us away?"

"She might."

"If she has, by the Eternal, but I'll cut her throat!"

A low moan drifted to their ears.

They glanced toward the door, and Levi saw a black shadow glide through the hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

HENRY BURTON TURNS UP.

WITH a cry of alarm, trembling in every joint, Levi arose to his feet, and tottering to the door, glanced up and down the dark hall, but could see or hear nothing; it was as dark and quiet as the grave.

"The light," he gasped.

Mr. Griggs brought the light, and together they searched the hall; no trace could they find of anything or anybody, and they returned to the room, and sitting down looked blankly at each other for some minutes.

"What was it?" then gasped Levi.

Mr. Griggs' active fears, the memories of his dark past career crowding upon him, gave to his mind a new turn, and he gasped in reply:

"I didn't see it perfectly; but—but—Levi—it looked like the grim avenging spirit of Woodward—so help me Heaven!"

Levi was silent. He was not in the least superstitious, yet his father's earnestness impressed him deeply.

"What did you make it out to be?" faltered Mr. Griggs.

"Nothing except a shadow. We saw it when we talked together in this room the last time."

"I remember," groaned the elder villain.

"Could it be the old woman?" queried Levi.

Grasping at this hope in preference to the haunting idea that it was an avenging spirit, Griggs, Sr., jumped to his feet with new energy and life, seizing the light and bidding Levi follow, he exclaimed:

"We'll see!"

Mrs. Griggs had failed in health, and had not been out of her room in over a week, and when father and son opened the door and entered her room they found her seated in an easy chair, her face buried in her hands, the tears flowing from her eyes.

"Crying, eh?" grumbled her husband. "What's the row with you?"

The poor woman made no reply, and after they had both glanced several times keenly about the room they departed, satisfied that she had not been outside of her room.

"O, Father in Heaven, pity me!" wailed Mrs. Griggs, when she was alone. "Pity me in this trying hour. O, God! that I should ever have borne such an unnatural son, who threatens to cut my throat. Charles Griggs, you are responsible for this; for years I have kept your secret, and it has gnawed in my heart like a canker worm. You would add murder to the list of your crimes—his murder. Why can I not die on the spot?"

God's will be done!

Like a specter the words entered her mind, assumed body and grew there, and her storm of grief passed by, and she was once again the crushed, the saddened woman, borne down by the weight of an awful secret, from which her very soul recoiled in horror, and yet which she nursed and hid from view—for what? a brutal husband—a worse son.

It was near the midnight hour when Levi and his father parted for the night, and both were worse for liquor, for to it they had recourse to stifle their fears, to bolster up their courage.

A dark form dogged Levi until he disappeared on board the *Antelope*; Tom Smith was unceasingly vigilant.

The next night Huckleberry stepped into the post-office for his mail, and among other letters was one addressed in a lady's writing; at once he knew that it came from the person who had warned him of the intended abduction of Maud Marsland.

He tore it open.

"Once more Maud Marsland is in danger, though I know not when, where or how it will fall. Guard and protect her for God's sake. And your life is in danger; men are on your track who will not hesitate to shed your blood. God forgive them. Heed this warning. I may never be able to send you another."

That was all; as before, no date, no name, no address.

Huckleberry went to Mr. Marsland's, and was shown into the parlor; Maud was the first to enter, and she advanced with both hands outstretched, and her eyes, love-lit, were turned up to meet his.

Huckleberry took her hands in his bruised and bandaged ones, and gazed into her face for a minute; gazed yearningly, and seeing there some encouragement, he released her hand, placed his own disengaged one about her waist and kissed her.

There was no outcry, no indignant word; she simply disengaged herself and retired from his reach, and thus stood when Mr. Marsland entered; he glanced sharply from one to the other, but said nothing until greeted by his visitor; as soon as Maud learned that he wished to see her father on business, she bade Huckleberry good-night and left them alone.

"Let me keep this, will you?" said Mr. Marsland, after reading the letter.

"Certainly, if you wish; and the warning, sir—will you take good care of Maud?"

At this familiar use of his daughter's name by Huckleberry, whose unknown origin Mr. Marsland could never forget, the gentleman's eyes flashed with anger; but he checked himself in time, and replied somewhat coldly:

"I am able to take care of Maud, and will do it. The warning is also for you; see that you heed it yourself."

"I shall do so, sir," said Huckleberry, and terminating the interview here, he made his way on board of the *Queen*, and shortly afterward went to bed to try and procure a good night's rest, something he had not known now for nearly a week.

At about the time that Huckleberry turned in, Levi Griggs and his father entered the study for another conversation; they took care this time to close and secure the door, which done, Levi asked:

"Well, old hoss, what's in the wind that you sent for me, and so particularly requested the pleasure of my company this evening?"

"It's about Henry Burton," replied Mr. Griggs.

"The devil you say! What of him?"

"He is coming here to-night after some more money."

"How do you know it?"

"I got a letter from him through the mail, in which he said he would arrive in this place about midnight—that I was to be waiting for him—and let him in when he tapped at my window; I haven't a cent, Levi, what's to be done?"

"First tell me why he comes in the middle of the night."

"Because he dares not be seen by daylight anywhere around here unless he is thoroughly disguised."

"He'll come alone, I suppose."

"Yes."

A crafty smile lit up Levi's face, and for the first time in his life he exhibited signs of courage of any kind; it was brute courage he displayed now, a courage born of the knowledge that the game was all in his own hands; he arose, took up a bunch of keys his father had laid down a few minutes before, went to the book-case, unlocked it, took a small bottle from behind a pile of books, and returning, sat down in his chair, and placing the vial on the table significantly said:

"I'm ready for him."

Griggs, senior, trembled with horror.

"No—no, Levi, not here. We'll tend to the whole thing. The game is growing desperate and we must play high; let me do as I want to, I say; or—I leave you to deal with him alone."

A groan of "stay!" was the only reply, at which Levi arose, and going to one side of the room brought out two decanters of liquor and three glasses; one of the decanters he nearly emptied, leaving only several glasses; into the other, about half full, he poured part of the contents of the vial.

Then they sat down and waited.

Twelve o'clock had come and gone, and nearly half another hour more had gone when there came a rap at the window; trembling at every joint, Griggs, senior, went to the window and opened it, and a man climbed in without any remark or word; nor did he speak until the window and shade were down and he was on his feet before them.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "I see you have been

kind enough to remember my appointment. But, by the way, I haven't long to stay, as I must be twenty miles from here by daylight; so if you have the spondulix ready I'll trouble you for it at once."

"But I haven't the money. I told you before I could give you no more."

"Pah! who cares for that. Come, out with the money, for I want to get away."

"And how are you going to cover twenty miles between this and daylight?" asked Levi. "You can't walk it."

"I don't intend to. I've a horse and wagon here in the back street, which, luckily for me, hasn't a house in its entire length."

At this piece of intelligence Levi's evil face lighted up.

"But hurry," said Burton. "Where's the money?"

"I haven't got it."

"You've got none for me then?"

"No."

"Very well, then, I will see how much what I know is worth to somebody else! I have here," slapping the breast of his coat, "a full account of the whole affair. If you pay me, I destroy it; if you don't, I am going to sell it to the other side. Now which is it?"

"Easy, my good fellow," said Levi, craftily. "My father is willing to do what is right, but he hasn't got the money just this minute. He has told me how matters stand, so just suppose we talk the matter over a little; but first let's have a drink."

"Agreed!"

Levi emptied one decanter into two glasses, and filled a third from the fuller one; this latter he gave to Burton, he and his father taking the others; at a signal the liquor was tossed off; Burton smacked his lips as he set down the glass, and a moment after, when he attempted to say something, his voice was thick and husky.

A queer, livid hue overspread his face, and he began trembling in every joint; he fell backwards into a chair, braced up for a minute, seemed to comprehend what had happened, and fastened on Levi a pair of terribly blood-shot eyes, raised his hand to threaten him, opened his lips to curse him.

But the hand fell, the lips parted further and his under jaw hung low, he gave a gasp, made a grasp for something to support him, missed, and fell upon the floor, the throes of death upon him.

"What's to be done with the body?" gasped Griggs, senior.

CHAPTER XXII.

GETTING RID OF THE BODY.

THE death agonies of Henry Burton were terrible to look upon, and Griggs, senior, powered in fear, and with his hands over his eyes shut out the fearful scene.

Coward though Levi was, he turned not away, but watched Burton until the last tremor of his body had come and gone, until the last breath had wheezed and gurgled from his body. Such is the effect of custom, of habit: at his first attempt toward destroying human life, he had been filled with remorse and fear, deathly fear, that his evil work would lead him to punishment; but when his plans miscarried, instead of being devotedly thankful that he had been spared the sin of murder, he became, as the reader has observed, wild with anger, and more determined than ever to imbrue his hands in blood.

He had grown accustomed to thoughts of murder now, and the thing itself had no terrors for him; all he feared was detection, and he had so far enjoyed such complete immunity from it that even his fears had greatly diminished.

In the present case he felt perfectly secure, as Burton had come alone in the dead of night, the fact of his coming being known alone to his father and himself; consequently his disappearance would not be noted or commented upon.

"What shall we do with the body?" groaned Griggs, senior, venturing at last to take his hands from a haggard and troubled face, looking at Levi as he spoke. "How shall we get rid of it?"

Levi had already decided this point in his mind. "Got a big bag in the house?" he asked.

"I don't know—I guess so."

"Well, go and get it."

"It's in the servants' quarters."

"What of that?"

"They might be awake, some of them, and come out and see me. You go along."

"No."

"I won't go alone," said Griggs, senior.

"And I won't leave the body here alone," said Levi, sharply. "You tell me where the bag is, and stay here, and I'll get it."

"Me stay here?" gasped his father.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"No—no!" he gasped, casting a frightened glance at the motionless body stretched on the floor; "not alone with *that*!"

"The devil!" growled Levi. "You must do one or the other, so take your choice."

Griggs, senior, was trembling like an aspen; his face had grown livid in color.

"I—I—don't know exactly where the bag is; and it's dark out there."

"Well?"

"Will you be afraid to stay here in the dark if I take the light?" apprehensively asked his father.

"Not a bit," was the reply. "Only hurry up; and don't disturb anybody if you can help it."

Griggs, senior, took up the lamp, opened the door and stepped out into the hall, traversed its length, and near the end opened a side door leading into the kitchen of the house.

He shortly returned with a salt bag, which he handed Levi as he put the lamp again on the table.

"Just the thing," remarked Levi, as he took the bag from his father's hand. "Now, old man, help me get him into it."

At this request to take hold of the body, Griggs, senior, grew weak as a child, and dropped into a chair with a low, horrified moan.

"Take hold!" said Levi, sharply.

"I can't—I dare not!"

"You're an infernal fool!" growled Levi; "the danger's all over now; but if you won't take hold I'll have to do it myself, I suppose," and raising the dead man's head with one hand he drew the bag under it as far as the shoulders, and alternately lifting and pulling he slowly worked the corpse into it, until nought but the feet stuck out, the bag not being deep enough to accommodate the entire length of the body.

But Levi soon remedied this by jamming down and doubling up both legs and body, after which he tied the mouth of the bag with a strong cord.

The clock had just chimed the hour of one when he finished his hideous task.

Mr. Griggs glanced askance at him, as much as to inquire what was next to be done.

Levi rested himself for several minutes, and then sneeringly said:

"I suppose you've no objections to taking hold of the bag now that he's in it?"

"Why?" faltered his father.

"I want you to lift it on my shoulders."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Carry it out and dump it in his wagon."

"You will be seen," gasped the old man. "Oh, Levi! for God's sake go and get Slinker, for he's used to such things."

"Darn Slinker!" hissed Levi. "He knows too much already for our good; if he sees this body, he'll want to know why we killed him, and if he finds out, he'll be a worse bloodsucker than this fellow ever was!"

"Would to God you had never found out!" groaned Griggs. "If I had ever thought that you would steal into the house in the dead of night and rob my safe, I'd have destroyed those papers long ago."

Levi laughed, for this was the first direct allusion to the robbery of his father's safe that had ever passed between them.

"Never mind, old man, it's all for the best, I'll swear. Now get hold of the bottom corners—so—that's it—now, up with it."

The bag was on Levi's shoulders; for a moment he swayed unsteadily beneath his load, and then having adjusted it squarely, he exclaimed:

"All right, old cock! You go ahead and open the back door; take a sniff and a wink around the premises, and if the way's clear, I'm off. No; leave the light behind," he added, as he saw his father about to pick up the lamp.

Griggs, senior, with many misgivings, and a heart filled with direst fear, obeyed the bidding of his rascally son, and opened the back door; standing within its shade, Levi softly said:

"Just go down the steps."

Griggs obeyed, but though fear rendered his hearing as acute as a fox's, he heard nothing to break the solemn stillness of the night, and he returned with noiseless steps to Levi's side.

The latter stepped outside, listened for a minute, both for any one outside or inside the house, and then cautiously descended the steps, that would squeak beneath the heavy but silent tread, no matter how careful he was.

The night was dark, and he had but little to fear of being observed, for it was impossible for him to see four feet ahead.

With many pauses to listen, he traversed the length of the grounds, and reached the gate that opened in the same back road that ran in the rear of Mr. Marsland's house, which we have before described as being lonely in the extreme, no house having yet been erected on its entire length.

Without difficulty he found the wagon, and deposited his burden in it; then mounted the seat and drove off, following the most unfrequented roads, his general direction being towards the lake.

About a mile west of the steamboat landings, the bluff rapidly advanced towards the lake, until no beach was left, the waters playing about the base of the perpendicularly rising rock.

The road led near the edge of the bluff, in some places not more than ten feet distant.

At one of these spots Levi reined in the horse, and leaped to the ground; then approached the rear of the wagon, got the bag on his shoulders, staggered to the edge of the bluff, and flung it over; he listened for a splash in the water, and when it had occurred, muttered:

"There—the job's done, and no one the wiser. Ha, ha! but I believe I'd become actually brave in a little while. So much for your threats and your knowledge, Mr. Burton; I bid you adieu!"

With this hideously grim bit of humor Levi turned away from the cliff, sauntered to the road, took out the whip, gave the horse a stinging cut, and as the animal started off at a mad gait he slung the whip in the back of the wagon, and after a single glance about him, started towards home on foot.

He found the back door unlocked, which he locked behind him after he entered the house, and then started for the study, where his father sat awaiting his return.

Sitting alone in the dead of night, situated as Mr. Griggs was, is not conducive to a comfortable condition of mind, and during Levi's absence, his father had suffered mentally untold and untellable horrors; his guilty mind pictured grimly and blackly the hideous front of a gallows, and him swinging on it; he writhed in agony, and felt as if he must fly the spot; the lamp was poorly filled, and when the light burned low and filled the room with shadows, in each one he saw an avenging spirit, a mocking enemy; and when his eyes strayed to the spot where he had seen the body lying, he started in wild alarm and cried out in anguish, for he thought he saw him there still, the glassy eyes fixed sternly on him, the finger of warning raised and shaking at him.

He dared not leave the room to procure another light, he dared not leave it to go to bed, for he must await his son's return; so trembling from head to foot, he crossed his arms on the desk before him, and there hid his face.

Thus Levi found him, just as the light was flickering to go out.

With an oath on his lips, Levi returned to the kitchen and procured a candle, and returning, placed it on the table just as the lamp-light expired.

Encouraged by the presence of a human being, Griggs, senior, raised his head; Levi saw a face wild and haggard, with deep-set eyes filled with a mournful, dreadful despair; the fearful change of the last couple of hours staggered him, but he managed to grunt out in an assumed tone of bravado and self-confidence:

"Why, old man, you look as if you had seen a ghost. Has anything happened?"

"No," was the hoarse reply; and then, with an effort, he added: "What have you done with—*it*?"

"Chuckled it over the bluff into the lake."

"Levi!" and in Griggs' voice was a mournful, awful yet prophetic tone of despair, "this dreadful crime will find us out."

"Nonsense," was the reply, although Levi's face grew nearly as white as his father's.

For several minutes they sat and gazed at each other, and then Levi mechanically shoved the decanter toward his father.

"Take a drink," he said. "It will brace you up."

"Would you murder me? That's the poisoned liquor."

"So it is!" exclaimed Levi. "It must be emptied," and jumping up he poured out its contents.

"Levi," faltered his father, as he set down the decanter; "did you—search the—the—body?"

"No."

A strained, hopeful look disappeared from Griggs' face, and he gasped:

"He said he had a full statement of—of—that old affair, in his pocket. It will betray us; oh, God, pity me!"

Levi was silent beneath this crushing blow; had his work failed? In seeking to destroy the evidence of one crime, had he saddled another and a more fearful one upon his shoulders?

As three o'clock struck they arose to go to bed; they went up-stairs together, and Griggs opening his door, a voice drifted out; it was Mrs. Griggs, and she was praying for them, and oh! what agony there was in her tones; they listened, and staggered beneath another shock, for her words

showed she either knew or guessed the horrible work of that night.

Rage succeeded the sickening fear that at first caused Levi's soul to cower and shrink, and bounding past his father into the room, he seized his unfortunate mother by the hair; he drew her head back with a sharp jerk, and, cursing her, hissed:

"Breathe one word of this if you dare!"

The poor woman gazed in affright from one to the other; then her face assumed a steadfast expression, and she calmly said:

"I have steeped my soul in sin enough in years gone by. I shall tell all now, for I cannot die burdened as I am, and I have not long to live."

"You'll have less, then," growled Levi, with a savage oath, and with his clenched fist felled his mother to the floor.

Turning fiercely to his father, he said:

"On your life see that she does not leave this room or see anybody," and then hastened away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EVIL TRIUMPHS FOR AWHILE.

THAT was a brutal blow of Levi's; doubly brutal that his mother was sick then even unto death.

There are no words in the language fit to describe what a wretch it is who would raise his hand to his mother. A mother's love deserves something better than blows, be she ever so wicked or bad.

The poor woman rose to her feet, the tears gushing from her eyes; without which relief, her overburdened heart must have broken.

No word passed between husband and wife, the former being as miserable as she was, though from different reasons.

When Levi rushed from the room it was to go to the *Antelope*, for he felt that he must have the support of Slinker, or he must give way beneath his load of guilt.

He stepped on board and found there, just on the point of leaving, Bill Gadding, who had, he learned, been prowling around Marsland's in the evening.

"Taint no use, though," he said; "the gal's changed her quarters. She must be grabbed in the street."

"Very well; do so," said Levi, quickly, impatient to be rid of him.

"It'll be twice as risky, but if you'll pay five hundred for the job, I'll try it."

"All right," said Levi, and Bill pulled away, for daylight was not far away now, and he did not wish any one to see him.

Impulse had brought Levi to the boat in a hurry to see Slinker; and impulse again sealed his lips; so it is always the case with criminals, they cannot think or act coolly; he flung himself into his berth and remained there until near seven o'clock, when he arose, feeling more confidence in himself.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "I'm a fool to get frightened; nobody knows it but the old woman, and she can be kept quiet until she kicks the bucket, which will be before very long; but I'll stay home to-day and watch her."

Calling Slinker, he gave him charge for the day, and then wended his way homeward, where he ate breakfast alone, his father not appearing.

"I knocked at the door, sir," said the waitress, "and he said he was sick."

When he had finished, Levi went up to his father's room, and was admitted a minute after knocking by his father, who indeed looked sick in soul and body.

"You'll never do to go to the bank," said Levi. "I'll leave word that you are sick. You must stay in the room and I'll prove myself a dutiful and loving son by bringing you all you want."

Mrs. Griggs lay there, white-faced and wan, and motionless from very lack of strength to move; to her appealing gaze Levi returned a black look, and left the room to procure breakfast for them, after delivering which he went to the bank with news of his father's illness, and returned home jubilant, as the day was fair and bright; jubilant in thinking his crime so completely covered up, not aware that he had been and was being dogged by Tom Smith, around whose lips was playing a queer smile, which indicated that he knew more than Levi Griggs thought anybody did.

Such was really the case, for Tom Smith had been prowling around the Griggs house, when hearing a wagon drive up, he had concealed himself among some shrubbery, had seen Burton tap on the window and gain admission; in less than a minute after the window was closed he was beneath it, but to his chagrin could neither see nor hear anything passing within.

When the stranger did not reappear he sauntered to the road, and had a look at his horse and wagon, and had but just entered the grounds

again, and had just time to conceal himself when he saw go out of the gate a man who staggered beneath some heavy burden, exactly what he could not tell, nor could he make out whether or not it was the stranger who bore the load.

When the horse was started, he got up and followed, and was not far distant, and dimly saw what was going on, when Levi dumped the body over the bluff; but laid still and saw the horse sent off with the stinging cut, and Levi turns his steps homeward; he passed within five feet of Smith, who recognized him positively.

"It looks like murder!" commented Smith, rising to his feet when Levi was some distance away. "I must investigate this. Shall I arrest him now and trust to luck, or wait?"

Other interests at stake decided him to wait, and he then determined to look for the sack he had seen flung into the lake.

With much difficulty he succeeded in descending the face of the cliff, but no object dotted the surface of the placid water.

"It must have sunk!" he said, musingly. "If it has, it can be found, for there's no current worth speaking of just here."

He was busied with his reflections while waiting for daylight, for the double purpose of fixing the spot in his memory, and finding a way to scale the bluff easier than by the way he had descended.

Just before the *Queen* started away, Smith boarded her, and asked Huckleberry if he would carry a sealed telegram and deliver it to the operator at Railroadville.

"With pleasure," was the response.

"Don't fail to do it: it's important."

"All right," said Huckleberry, "I'll attend to it," and when he reached Railroadville he lost no time in putting it into the operator's hands.

"Bob, take train to Railroadville, and steamer *Queen*, to Lakeport, without fail. Will meet you."

So read the dispatch, and had Huckleberry seen it he might have selected from among his passengers the respondent to it; a tall, powerfully-built man, of dark complexion and keen black eyes.

This person was Bob, and Smith led him on the pier, having been "piping off" the movements of Levi Griggs all day long.

They had a short conversation in a room of the village hotel, after which Smith asked the landlord if he had a grappling iron.

"No, nor I don't think you can find more'n one in the place."

"Who's got that?"

"Huckleberry."

"Who? Oh, yes, I remember; Wood, the captain of the *Queen*."

"That's him," said the landlord.

It was about nine o'clock when they boarded the *Queen*, and Smith at once addressed himself to Huckleberry:

"I was told you had a grappling iron."

"I have."

"Could we borrow that and a boat for a couple of hours?" and seeing Huckleberry hesitate, said: "I feel that I can trust you and will be frank. I suspect a murder has been committed, and want to grapple for the body; but we don't want anybody to get word of our efforts, or our birds may fly."

"They are at your service," replied Huckleberry.

"And could we get another iron like yours?"

"I could get you one, but it's a pull of six miles up the lake to a fisherman's."

It was Smith's turn to hesitate; he was uncertain how far to take Huckleberry into his confidence; but unwilling to appear more reserved than the captain of the *Queen*, he said:

"Very well; we accept your offer, although we are sorry to give you so much trouble."

"No trouble at all, sir," said Huckleberry, "as long as it helps the right, for I've suffered some myself through the dark deeds of others."

Two boats were lowered into the water Tom and Bob entering one, Huckleberry the other; they pulled side by side to where Tom had seen the body tossed off the bluff, and leaving them to grapple with the single iron, Huckleberry made his boat fairly spin along toward the fisherman's of whom he had spoken.

He reached the place, obtained the iron, and was on his way back when he suddenly came upon a small boat, neither rower having heard the other; both pulled quickly to the right, and the boats passed within five feet of each other; glancing into the other boat, Huckleberry saw a stalwart rower and a figure prone in the stern, evidently a woman's, for he could see light skirts; and then it faded from view, the rower having bent briskly to his oars.

He only thought of it as a queer encounter, and soon forgot it as even that, his mind becoming occupied with the dark deed outlined by Tom Smith.

If he had only known the truth!

Enveloped in the light skirts he saw was the form of Maud Marsland.

Fate had ordained that the horse and wagon should fall into the hands of Bill Gadding, who, after returning by boat to the hut near Barren Island Channel, had started to tramp through the woods to get some groceries from a store situated where three roads met; on an old wood-road in the woods he found the horse wandering, and at once took possession of him; he soon discovered a use for him, that of aiding in the abduction of Maud Marsland; only one thing stood in the way; he could not drive within three miles of the hut; this he overcame by driving the horse to a point where he could reach the lake; taking the horse from the shafts, he tethered him, walked back to the hut and rowed down the lake, landing within a dozen feet of where he had left the horse and wagon.

He drove into Lakeport just after dark.

Fortune favored him, for he saw Maud going up the street, presumably to the post-office; a short cut home lay through a dark, deserted block, and here Bill at once drove; unsuspecting, Maud chose the short cut home, for she knew her father would be anxious if he learned she was out after dark.

Hurrying along, she was about to pass the wagon, when, suddenly, she was prostrated by a vicious blow on the head; ere she could cry for help a hand was clasped over her mouth, and she knew that chloroform was being given her.

Consciousness fled; Gadding flung her roughly into the wagon, and put off as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUCKLEBERRY ON DECK.

GADDING spared not the whip, and in a little over an hour's time he had reached the spot where his boat was moored; conveying the unconscious girl to it, he laid her down in the stern and administered some more chloroform, then he took the horse back to the main road, and as Levi had done, started him on by himself, to rid himself of a dangerous instrument in his villainy.

Gadding gritted his teeth and held his breath when he came upon Huckleberry, and he only breathed easy again when darkness had hid him from view, and he knew by listening that he was not being pursued.

An hour later his captive was in her prison home.

Huckleberry reached the place where the grapplers were working, and remained with them until midnight, when he returned to the vessel.

"Something's going on up the street, I guess," said Dick, who had just turned out to go on watch the last part of the night. "There seems to be some excitement in the village."

Paying no attention to this, however, Huckleberry gave him a few directions about the boat when she returned, and then went to bed.

He had hardly been on deck five minutes the next morning when he heard of Maud's disappearance.

His heart sickened within him and he grew hot and cold by turns; he was dumb for a few minutes, and then calming himself, he inquired for the particulars of the affair, and obtained them as far as any one knew them.

She had left the post-office to go home, and was seen just before turning down the street where Gadding laid in waiting for her; it was remembered by somebody that they had seen a strange wagon drive through several streets, and that solved the manner of her abduction.

For a long time he wavered, scarce knowing what to do; and then five minutes before starting time he was about to call Dick Larkin and put him in charge and remain behind himself, when there came rushing down the hill, at breakneck speed, a man on horseback.

The horse was covered with foam, and must have been ridden hard and fast.

"Thank God, I'm in time!" exclaimed the rider, as he jumped to the ground and flung the reins to a boy, bidding him take the horse to a livery stable.

He hurried on board the *Queen*.

"The captain?" he abruptly said.

Huckleberry bowed.

"Can you reach Railroadville by ten-thirty?"

"I'm afraid not; that is a whole hour ahead of regular time."

"Must an innocent man be hung, then?" he blurted out. "Captain, you must make it! At eleven o'clock this morning a man is to be hung on a charge of murder, at Lower Sandusky, twelve miles from Railroadville; that will give me half an hour to get a special train and save the poor fellow's life."

"You say he is innocent?"

"He is."

"Then I'll put the *Queen* through if the timbers

hang together long enough," said Huckleberry, earnestly, for the mental picture of an innocent man condemned by circumstances appealed with strength to his feelings, for he was placed in the same position himself.

He flew to the pilot-house, the lines were cast off, Jemmy was given his orders, and the *Queen* commenced her race against time, and the stake was a human life.

The blower was kept running at its highest rate of speed, and the fires fairly writhed, hot with life, on the grate bars, beneath the steady and heavy draught.

At every stroke of the piston the vessel shivered from stem to stern, like a huge leviathan in mortal agony; and the timbers groaned in sympathy, while every bit of glass on board jingled, or cracked, or creaked, as if being rent into fragments.

Everybody on board was excited; not boisterously, but with that quiet, keen kind of excitement which only comes on rare occasions, and feeling which the veriest coward exults in danger and enjoys it.

The *Antelope*, with half an hour's start, was passed in short order, much to their surprise, and then Huckleberry laid the *Queen's* head once more toward Barren Island Channel; to make the time they must risk a passage through this dangerous place.

On they dashed, and the land was within a dozen feet of each side of them; on, until the narrow angle was in sight.

His face paled and he flung off his cap, for his head was burning hot; and leaned out of the window, and took a long, sharp look at the place.

"Slow up a little," he called to Jemmy.

"Ay—ay!"

He rang the deck gong.

"On deck!" cried Dick.

"The line, have you got it ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"The old one or the new one?"

"The new one."

"That's right, the old one would never stand the strain. Stand by, Dick, and for God's sake use a steady hand and a correct eye."

"Ay—ay!"

The moment of supreme peril was at hand, and except the noise of the vessel, the silence was that of the grave.

But suddenly a scream, far away and faint, yet recognizable, floated to Huckleberry's ears; a glance, no longer than enough to wink an eye, he took toward the mainland, saw two figures, and a handkerchief waving, disappear—and—"Stop her!" he yelled—pull the wheel hard down—the rope had reached the stump—an awful strain—a groan in every timber—her nose, coming around with irresistible force, carried away a few feet of the soil that projected from the bank before them—none breathed, so frightful it was—death and destruction gripped them tight—one bell, go ahead, and drawing a long breath they all knew it was over, and they were safe.

"The rope, captain," called Dick.

"Let it go," was the reply, and away it flew through the hawse hole, and dropped into the wake.

The jingle bell rang. Jemmy put on all steam, and groaning and moaning, a separate tone from each timber, the leviathan plunged onward again.

Huckleberry looked at his watch, bent down and cried:

"Faster yet! Faster, Jemmy!"

"Ay—ay, sir," came the ready response, not once, but thrice ere they reached their destination, and each time the *Queen* received a fresh impetus.

At five minutes past ten, the messenger sprang upon the pier at Railroadville and bounded away.

An inquisitive crowd, surprised at the *Queen's* early arrival, went on board, but beat a precipitate retreat, when they caught, through a hatchway, a glimpse of the boilers, for they were red-hot.

Everybody was ordered off, no one remaining on board but Huckleberry, Jemmy and Dick, and they half expected to be blown up every minute, since they dared not introduce into the boilers any cold water, and they had no hot, as the condenser had ceased working under the strain.

The fires were hauled and safety was assured, just as Huckleberry was handed a dispatch.

It consisted of but one word.

"Saved!"

His passengers stood on the pier, eager to learn the result of their awful sail, and when he told them from the upper deck that the boat was out of danger, and read the short telegram, there arose three such heartfelt cheers as never before or since agitated the air of Railroadville.

It was several hours before Huckleberry suf-

ficiently recovered from the tax of the excitement he had undergone to think calmly, and then his thoughts were of Maud Marsland. The incident of the meeting on the lake the night before obtruded itself on him, but he tried to banish it, for she had been taken away in a wagon; but it persisted, and, like Banquo's ghost, would not down; and in connection with it occurred that fleeting glimpse of a handkerchief and two figures; had the waving of the handkerchief been a signal of warning?

He crowded the *Queen* on her homeward trip, and once at Lakeport, went to see Mr. Marsland, but turned away with a saddened heart at being rather roughly treated by him.

"You said you could take care of her," said Huckleberry, in a low tone of voice, not intended for him, but which Mr. Marsland overheard.

"You whelp!" cried Mr. Marsland, "what do you mean by slurring my ability to care for my daughter? Get out of this house and never come into it again; and, moreover, do not trouble yourself one bit to look for her."

Without reply, Huckleberry left the house, and walked slowly and thoughtfully towards the *Queen*.

"Get out the boat, Dick," he said. "We must go after that line."

Huckleberry having seated himself in the stern, Dick plied the oars, and after a long pull they entered the channel.

"Let me out just here," said Huckleberry, when opposite the hut. "You get the line and then come here again."

"Ay—ay!" replied Dick, in his usual willing, cheery way, as Huckleberry jumped ashore, and dove straight into the bush and wound his way through the broken masses of rock.

He was going to the hut; he had only a vague idea why he was doing so, hardly that of expectation of finding Maud Marsland there, for everything he had learned of her disappearance pointed in other directions.

Yet he toiled on, and at last he saw dimly outlined through the darkness the old, time-worn, tumble-down hut.

A light gleamed through one of the windows, and toward it he plodded, with little or no care at concealing his coming.

Gadding, in fancied security, had no suspicion of unwelcome visitors arriving, and sat on a low stool smoking a pipe; while in one corner, bound hand and foot, stretched on some loose straw, lay Maud Marsland.

This was what Huckleberry saw when he glanced into the hut through the window; the door was ajar; he crept to it, drew his revolver, slammed open the door, and with one bound was beside Gadding, at whose head he presented his revolver.

Huckleberry was "on deck!"

CHAPTER XXV.

GADDING GOES TO THE WALL.

So completely surprised were both captor and captive that neither could speak for a minute; and then Maud broke the silence, with a half-sobbing, half-laughing cry:

"Huckleberry! I'm saved!" and then, to keep up the reputation of her sex, she fainted away.

"Do you surrender?" sternly asked Huckleberry.

"No!" shrieked Gadding, regaining the use of his voice, at the same time making an attempt to reach his own revolver or knife.

Huckleberry pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver to Gadding's temple, saying, coolly:

"Quiet, man, quiet! The first move toward resistance and I'll shoot you with as little compunction as I would a cat; I swear it!"

Gadding did not fail to note the determination of his antagonist's voice, and became as quiet as a lamb.

Shifting his revolver a little to one side, but keeping it on a line with Gadding's head, Huckleberry drew the trigger; at the report so close beside his ear, and the sting of the burn, Gadding yelled, and tried to spring to his feet, but was pushed firmly down into his seat again.

"Steady!" said Huckleberry. "I'm going to fire again!"

Crack!

"And again!"

Crack!

Gadding glanced at the revolver.

"You needn't be afraid," said his captor, grimly. "I'll reserve some for you; there are seven chambers in it, and I've only emptied three. They are signals to my friends outside."

Dick had returned to the place indicated by his captain, and was patiently awaiting his return, when he heard the pistol shot break the stillness; and quickly succeeding it heard two others.

"Cap's in trouble, I guess!" exclaimed Dick. "Here's to see what's up," and at a breakneck

pace, stumbling at every other step, falling and bruising himself at every third, he plunged on through rock and thicket, and was in sight of the hut when another report rang out upon the night air.

Picking up a fragment of rock, for he was unarmed, Dick sprang to the door of the hut, and gazing within, saw Huckleberry with revolver at Gadding's head, saw the form of Maud in the corner, and in his surprise dropped the rock on his toe, and spent the next ten minutes in mingled exclamations of joy and pain.

"On deck, cap," he said, with a grin of joy, touching his cap.

"See if you can find a piece of rope or something, to tie this fellow's hands."

"Here's the very thing," said Dick, and quickly unfastened the leather strap he used about his waist to support his pants in lieu of suspenders.

"Good! Fasten his hands behind him."

Gadding showed signs of fight for a minute, but a slight pressure of the revolver against his temple brought a realization of how completely he was in their power, so he submitted with the worst possible grace, while Dick wrapped the strap around and around his wrists, and finally buckled it.

"Search him! He's got a barker or two, I think."

Dick did so, and found a revolver and a dirk.

"Just cock your revolver, Dick, and keep it at his head; and if he gives you any tronble, blow his brains out instantly."

"On deck, cap!" exclaimed Dick. "I allers obeys orders to the letter," and any little malicious pleasure he took in tormenting his captive by rubbing his revolver under his nose, or passing it before his face, or fiddling with the trigger when the muzzle was directed towards Gadding's head, can be excused when one remembers that Dick knew how Huckleberry had been misused, Dick jumping to the conclusion that the greater part of his captain's troubles had sprung from this man.

Huckleberry turned his attention to Maud, and by liberally using some water he found in the hut soon succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, at which her bonds having been cut, she flung her arms around Huckleberry's neck, and gazed fondly into the face so near her own.

Huckleberry kissed her; and kissed again when no objections were offered, to all of which Dick was considerate enough to turn a blind eye, at first on purpose and afterward because he couldn't see through the mist in his eyes, brought there by the knowledge of Huckleberry's happiness.

"She's a nice gal, and got a proud dad, and Huckleberry's the bravest feller ever was, but he ain't got no pedigree; but it'll come all right, I guess—there—how does that feel?" he added aloud, shoving the cold revolver barrel beneath Gadding's nose, as much to distract his own attention as anything else.

We said Huckleberry kissed Maud; we will now go further, and add that Maud kissed Huckleberry, and it was enough to repay him for his whole lifetime of trouble, or so he thought at the moment, for he completely forgot it.

He helped Maud to her feet, and then began searching the hut, the only thing he thought worth taking, however, being a lantern, which he at once lighted, and leading the way with Maud, Dick brought up in the rear with the prisoner, who at first refused to get into the boat, but who finally did so when threatened, remarking:

"The game's up't seems, an' I s'pose I must go to the wall."

"Fact," said Dick; "just sit down in the stern there."

Dick wanted to pull back, but this Huckleberry would not listen to, [so the faithful fellow sat beside Gadding, ostentatiously displaying the revolver, and religiously keeping his eyes from off the front of the boat, where Maud sat directly behind Huckleberry.

It was after midnight when they reached the *Queen's* side.

"Take him to the jail, Dick," said Huckleberry, nodding at the prisoner; "and tell the constable to keep his arrest a secret. I'll go home with Miss Marsland."

They went as far as the top of the hill together, and there they separated.

A light was burning in the parlor when they arrived in front of Maud's home; in it were gathered Mr. and Mrs. Marsland and the two detectives, who, after an arduous day's work, had been acknowledging themselves baffled, plunging the parents into deepest despair.

It was at this juncture that Huckleberry rang the bell.

Mr. Marsland answered it.

"You here again!" he exclaimed, catching sight of Huckleberry first.

"Yes, sir; notwithstanding your orders, I have

ventured to come once more for the purpose of restoring—"

Maud could keep still no longer.

With a laugh and a sob, she flung herself upon her father's breast, crying:

"Papa!—papa!"

The poor man was thunderstruck, dazed; could it be Maud?

One glance into the bright face, and he strained her to his heart madly, fondly; then released her as he heard a low cry and his wife's feet rushing across the parlor, and drew her inside; but not before she had seized Huckleberry's hand, and drawn him in with her; she released it to meet her mother's joyful greeting, and then gliding to Huckleberry's side, flushing slightly under the gaze of the two strangers, she said:

"Give him the thanks; I owe it all to him."

Questions were asked and explanations followed, and when Huckleberry told the directions he had sent the jailer in regard to the prisoner, Smith said:

"A wise move, and will give us time to work out the rest of this mystery before our birds have a chance to take to the wing."

"And," he said to Mr. Marsland, "say nothing about your daughter's return for a day or so."

"Very well," said Mr. Marsland. "Are you going now?"

"Yes."

"Papa!"

It was Maud who spoke, and he stooped slightly to hear what she said; and then straightening up he said:

"Gentlemen, I owe one of your number an apology. Huckleberry—excuse me—Captain Wood, I owe you an apology, which, although such things are usually hard to make, I take pleasure in making before these gentlemen; I treated you rudely, when my own heart was torn and bleeding, and this must be my excuse. I hope I have your pardon."

"With all my heart, sir," said Huckleberry, not offensively, but as a gentleman who receives but his rights from another.

They left the house together, and Bob and Smith no longer concealed their vocations; they were detectives.

"We want your help," said Smith. "We are going to search for the body again."

"If I can help I'm willing," was the reply.

It yet lacked several hours of daylight, and during this time they could work unobserved.

Success eluded their efforts for a long time, and day was breaking when Smith said:

"This must be the last throw."

And the last it was, for the grapple fastened into something, which when it reached the surface proved to be a salt bag.

With much difficulty they hoisted it into the boat, and then pulled to the *Queen* with all possible expedition, and conveyed the bag and its contents into the store-room on the dock.

They opened the bag and drew from it, as they had expected, the bloated body of a human being; they examined it and went through the pockets.

Robbery had not been the object of the murder, for they found money and a watch and other trinkets; while from the inside vest pocket they took a large yellow envelope, which had once borne an address, now almost obliterated; opening it they found half a dozen wet, adhering sheets of letter paper; this was the only manuscript of any kind found on the body, and therefore to this they had recourse to find some name or address, or something by which to learn who the murdered man was.

They went on board again, locking the store-room behind them, and commenced drying the wet mass before the furnaces, during which they heard the bell ring, the whistle toot for casting off the *Antelope's* lines, and then heard her move away.

A few minutes later they could take the leaves apart, and selecting the first one, they began reading; then moved up on deck, and side by side read page after page, their eyes opening in surprise, and every once in a while Huckleberry saw their glances directed toward him.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Bob. "If that don't beat the deuce."

"It is strange," assented Smith, and then gazed at Huckleberry in a vacant way.

"Boat's going to leave," said her captain.

"Yes," said Smith, "and we'll go ashore. Shake young fellow; let me congratulate you."

"What for?" asked Huckleberry, as he shook hands with both.

"You'll know soon enough," with which mysterious answer Huckleberry was forced to be content.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GADDING'S DESPERATION.

THE detectives went on shore, and making their way to the hotel ordered breakfast in a private

room, during the eating of which they conversed quietly but earnestly; it was evident that they had learned something of a surprising nature, in connection with which Huckleberry's name was frequently repeated.

"It's a plain enough case of murder," said Bob; "and the Griggses are in a bad hole. But how about the bank business?"

"Knowing what we do about young Griggs, it's more than likely he was at the bottom of it; and when we arrest him for the murder that will come out."

"And the abduction of the young lady?"

"That can be cleared up easily enough now that we've got in custody the fellow that carried her off."

"What's the next step?" said Bob.

"The arrest of young Griggs."

"My own idea," commented Bob. "Shall we go to his house?"

"Yes; but first we must find out if he is at home."

"Suppose we make a start now, as you seem to have finished your breakfast."

Agreeing on this they sauntered into the bar-room of the hotel, and calling for a couple of cigars, lighted them, and commenced smoking in a most leisurely way, while keeping their ears open for every word uttered by the loungers in the bar-room.

From odd scraps they learned that Mr. Griggs had not been at the bank the day before on account of illness, and would not be there that day, as a caller that morning had been refused admission on the plea that he was too sick to see anybody; and also learned from a casual remark or two that Levi had gone with his steamboat that morning.

A glance of intelligence passed between the detectives, and they sauntered outdoors and walked slowly up the street.

"We must leave the body in the store-house, and keep the matter a secret until we have Levi in custody. We must arrest him to-night, after he returns to his father's house. And now I propose dropping into the jail to see the fellow they've got prisoner there," to all of which Bob most readily assented, and toward the jail they at once turned their steps, and at which they arrived in time to pounce on a very exciting scene.

Obeying instructions, Dick had delivered Gadding to the jailer, with orders to keep the prisoner's arrival a secret, and Dick did not even tell the jailer on what charge Gadding was incarcerated.

Now the jailer was one of those little great men; puffed up to the dignity of a whole town council, over the penny position of public trust he occupied; in size he was small, but within his frame was stowed pomposity sufficient for a dozen ordinary men, and linked with it he had a large vein of conceit and curiosity.

So, Dick's back had not been turned ten minutes before the jailer began inquisitively trying to find out who and what Gadding was; assuring the prisoner that he was a man of influence in the community, and confidence reposed in him would be sure to meet with a fitting reward.

During the first part of this harangue fired at his head by the jailer, Gadding had maintained a sullen silence, for he feared the consequences of his misdeeds; and in his mind had conceived the project of breaking out of the jail if it were possible; but ere the jailer had finished, Gadding's face lighted up and he began to manifest some interest in what he heard, but which was only assumed, however, as succeeding events will clearly show; the truth was that he had read aright the character of his keeper and meant to profit by it if he could.

His first answer was a growl, but becoming more softened he partially satisfied the curiosity of his jailer, and then stopped; which only inflamed the other's idea to hear more, which was what Gadding desired.

"How can you expect a man to talk quietly with a thick strap cutting into his wrists?" exclaimed Gadding, in response to a question. "Why don't you take it off?"

"It mightn't be safe."

"Safe! That's good; here I am between four heavy walls, not to say anything of being watched by a brave and spunky man, and it ain't safe to give me the use of my hands," and he laughed in pretended derision.

This broad compliment tickled the little pompous fellow immensely, and egged on by both great good feeling toward his flatterer and his curiosity, he removed the straps from the prisoner's wrists.

A bold scheme entered Gadding's head; he had not yet been confined in the cell, but was in what might be called the office, the door of which opened on a hall that led directly to the street; this door was locked, and in his hand the jailer

held the key, toying with it as he propounded his questions.

Gadding was unknown in Lakeport, and he felt that once outside the jail-walls, he could pass unmolested through the place, and make his escape.

Little by little he got his keeper off guard, and then, driven on by desperation, he made a sudden dive at the jailer, felled him to the floor, and snatched the key from his hand, then bounded to the door and inserted the key in the lock, paying no attention to the jailer, who had apparently been stunned by the blow and fall he received.

Not so, however; and as Gadding opened the door, the jailer struggled to his feet, and rushing forward, caught hold of Gadding and tried to pull him back into the room. With the full light of day streaming through the open door, and a view of the street beyond, Gadding fought desperately; hot and heavy were the blows he delivered, and he had beaten down the jailer's opposition, and was on a brisk run for liberty, when the two detectives presented themselves in his path. At them he rushed with a yell, and so sudden was the shock that the chances at first seemed with him; then fortune changed her face, and a well-directed blow of Smith's prostrated him completely, and he was picked up, and in less than five minutes was inside of a cell.

He was completely crestfallen when he saw Smith fairly in the face.

"We've had some acquaintance before, eh, Gadding?" said Smith, to which he received no reply.

Knowing his man, the detective, by alternately threatening and coaxing, succeeded in obtaining from the prisoner a true story of his connection with the abduction of Maud Marsland.

For the first time Slinker was drawn into the affair, and Smith said:

"I should have taken the chances and arrested him anyhow; but now we know what we are about."

They left the jail.

The climax was fast approaching.

A storm cloud, black and awful, was gathering rapidly over the unsuspecting heads of the Griggses, and before long the thunderbolt must fall.

Little did Levi Gregg dream of what was in store for him so early in the future; on the contrary, he was in a jubilant frame of mind, for he thought every obstacle removed from his path, and had had the satisfaction of that morning seeing the *Queen* reach Railroadville behind time, too late for the train.

The condenser of the engine, strained and racked by that awful race against time, was badly out of working order, and they had been compelled to run slow.

Huckleberry was chagrined at his failure to make time, and at once put the machinists to work; but they could accomplish but very little during the short stay at Railroadville, and the *Queen* left that afternoon in bad condition, with the prospects of a very slow run home.

This fact was patent to Levi Griggs also, and he placed runners on the street to sing it out to the public, for the purpose of drawing patronage to the *Antelope*.

It had its effect, and both he and Google Slinker exulted in the addition to their freight and passenger list; Slinker was in a splendid frame of mind that day, and among other unaccustomed things invited Sandy Quirk to go up the street and have a drink.

They went into the self-same saloon where it will be remembered Dick overheard Slinker giving his confidence to Quirk about the anchored torpedo; since which time, much to the latter's disgust, Slinker had been very close-mouthed.

Over the drink, Quirk grumbled out something to the effect that he had not been treated fairly.

"You helped rob the bank, and made a big stake, and I never got a show for a dollar; I've just made up my mind to claim a divvy in that 'ere affair."

"Which you won't get," retorted Slinker, angrily, to which Quirk gave back a hot answer; the quarrel became fierce, and blows might have followed had not the keeper of the place rushed to the spot and separated them.

"Never mind," said Quirk, *sotto voce*, "I will get square with you! You won't trust me, and I won't tell what you'd give your bottom dollar to know."

Slinker overheard this and it made him uneasy; to what could Quirk have reference? Were the officers of the law on his track, or did Quirk intend to give him away?

He concluded that it was the latter, and with clenched hands and gritted teeth, he resolved to forever silence Quirk that very night, and then if he saw danger ahead to light out as soon as possible.

Of the quarrel, or his suspicion, he said nothing to Levi, but went, with contracted brows, to his place at the wheel, his face only lighting up once,

and that was when the *Queen* began perceptibly falling behind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SLINKER'S CRIME.

THE detectives had plenty to keep them busy all day long.

Among other things, they called on Mrs. Wood, and had a long conversation with her, at the end of which she cried with joy, and between her sobs managed to say:

"He deserves his good fortune, gentlemen, for a better, more honest lad don't live. God bless him!"

They visited Mr. Marsland, and when he heard their story, he fairly gasped:

"Can it be possible? I always knew there was something noble and high born about the lad." And when they had gone he could scarcely contain what he had learned, and, despite his utmost endeavors, could not forbear some mysterious hints that set Maud's heart to beating rapidly.

And then Smith and his associate had to view the body again, and have several long talks, and visit the bank, and hunt up sundry clews; after all of which, they decided upon a plan of action.

The *Antelope* had reached her pier; the passengers were discharged; then she was moored for the night, and Levi went ashore. Meeting an acquaintance, he learned that there was a mysterious prisoner in jail, for, as such things always do, it had leaked out. It startled Levi somewhat, and his thoughts at once reverted to Gadding; but no, it could hardly be he, and yet why this concealment?

He glanced uneasily about him and caught a glimpse of Bob; his heart leaped into his throat, and he wondered who the stranger was. Could it be any one following him?

He hurried homeward, and, out of breath, sank into a chair in his father's office, the scene of his villainous work on so many occasions.

He was in a state of wild alarm.

It scarcely seemed probable that all had been discovered, else he would have been arrested, if at all, when the boat touched the pier.

But the more he thought the more alarmed he became, and he resolved to start out that very night, visit the old hut near Barren Island Channel, and then fly the place, for awhile, at least.

A look of horror crept into his face when, glancing at the window, he saw, just vanishing, a human face that had been pressed against the glass. He was in an agony of apprehension now, and decided to fly at once. But could he get away unobserved? Was the house being watched?

He sank back in the chair in a half stupefied state, and thus remained, while minute by minute the time sped away.

It was a face he saw at the window; it was that of Bob, who had followed him home and entered the grounds unobserved in the then rapidly-falling darkness.

Smith had remained behind, and after the steamer was secured had sauntered on board; a minute or two later he received a mysterious wink from Quirk, whom he followed into a shady corner.

"You said you would protect me if I told all I knew about some affairs here in Lakeport?" said Quirk, who was burning with a desire for revenge on Slinker.

"I did."

"Well, you arrest the pilot of this craft, Slinker he calls himself, and I'll tell you all," said Quirk, earnestly. "Hist! there he is now—he'll see us if we don't take care; don't arrest him now, he goes armed to the teeth, and is a desperate cuss. Come to-night after he goes to sleep, when he is not on his guard. Go, quick, now; I don't want him to get his eye on me."

But Slinker had got his eye on Quirk, and beneath his breath was cursing him madly, and swearing vengeance; the sight of the stranger was alarming, for he judged him to be a detective to whom he was being given away, and laid his hand on his revolver.

Thinking Quirk's advice sound, and feeling sure of his man, Smith affected carelessness, and sauntered off the boat and up the hill until out of sight, when at a brisk pace he started towards the home of the Griggs.

In the yard he found Bob.

"He's in there," said Bob; "I saw him through the same window that Burton must have entered, according to your description."

"Shall we go in now?"

"As you say."

"Then come on," said Smith; "it might as well be over and done with," and leading the way around the house, he mounted the steps and rang the bell, taking care to stand back in the shadow when the servant came to the door.

"Tell Mr. Griggs—the young one—that Mr. Marsland wishes to see him," said Smith, assuming as nearly as possible the tone of the person he represented.

"Won't you walk into the parlor?" inquired the girl.

"Yes, just go in and tell him, and I'll step inside after wiping my feet."

The ruse succeeded, and the girl started upstairs to Levi's room, whither he had gone some time before; he was busily engaged in getting together some things for his flight when the bell rang, its echo going to his soul like a knell of death.

Dropping his bundle, he opened the sash, and prepared to take a leap to the ground if his fears were realized; and standing thus like a wolf at bay, he waited with bated breath, and trembled when he heard a footstep on the stairs.

A knock fell on his door.

"Who is it?" he called in a strained, excited voice.

"Me," said the girl.

"Mary?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Marsland has called, sir. He's waitin' in the parlor to see you."

Levi breathed free again, and thought—were not all his fears as foolish and groundless as this now appeared to him to be.

"I'll be right down," he said; and after the girl's footsteps had died away in the distance, he unlocked his door, went out and slowly downstairs, and stepping within the parlor saw, not Mr. Marsland, but a stranger before him.

A cry of alarm was upon his lips, and he was about to turn and fly, when a grip on his arm caused him to look beside him, and in very terror his cry remained unuttered, for he saw a stern, determined face, a pair of clear, piercing eyes, and a cocked revolver at his temple.

"You are my prisoner," said Smith. "Do you surrender?"

An unintelligible moan was all the reply as the blanched and stricken villain staggered in sudden weakness, and fell upon a sofa near at hand.

"The bracelets!" said Smith.

Bob advanced, and with a click they were upon Levi's wrists and he was manacled.

"You take care of him, Bob, and I'll take a look for the old man," saying which, Smith left the room and walked up-stairs.

He had learned the location of the room in which Griggs, senior, was; and knocked at the door when he reached it.

"Who's there?" came from within.

"Levi," said Smith, in a feigned tone which deceived the old man, for he opened the door, upon which he found himself collared, and heard the terror-inspiring words:

"You are a prisoner!"

With a gasp and a groan, Griggs clutched at the door for support, and made no response.

"Come with me," said Smith, sternly, and taking him by the shoulder, he drew him out into the hall; as he did so the detective caught a glimpse through the crack of the door of a thin, wan figure clad in white, as it was raised from the bed, and saw the exquisite look of anguish that covered the saddened, pinched face.

"It has come at last," she murmured, in grief-stricken tones. "God in Heaven pity me!"

A pang of regret Smith could not help but feel, as he heard the sorrowful appeal to Him on high.

Without a word he led his captive down-stairs and put a pair of handcuffs on him, and then, after a moment's pause, he said:

"Bob, we'll not take them to jail to-night, but keep them here. And while you stay to guard them I'll go and capture Slinker, whose presence on the trial will be almost imperative."

"All right," said Bob, and his brother detective, after going to the kitchen and sending one of the girls up to Mrs. Griggs, started toward the lake; he could not help wondering, as he went along, whether Slinker would give him any trouble, or whether he would submit with as little resistance as the two prisoners he had just made.

Let us precede the detective on board of the *Antelope*, and see how affairs had progressed since he was there before.

Slinker had rightly judged that Smith was a detective, and consequently knew that it would be best for him to make tracks as soon and as fast as possible.

He had heard the story of the mysterious prisoner in the jail, and somehow he conceived it to be Gadding and nobody else.

Going to his state-room, he quickly packed up what few things he wanted to take with him, and concealed about his person the various packages of money in his possession; then he lowered one of the boats into the water, and was all ready to start.

But he had one more aim in view—revenge on Quirk.

With a small iron bar in his hand he crept forward to where he had caught a glimpse of Quirk stretched lazily out on deck, a coil of rope for a pillow, and a pipe in his mouth.

The pipe was out, for Quirk had fallen asleep. Stealthily Slinker stole upon him, and a gleam of fiendish satisfaction shot across his features as, with uplifted bar, he paused to look upon his intended victim.

Quirk must, even in his sleep, have felt the influence of the malignant mind of his enemy—of the pair of gleaming, vengeful eyes that gloated over his defenselessness, for he stirred uneasily and gave signs of waking.

A twist of the wrist to make the blow more effective, and Slinker struck.

There was a sickening sound of the crushing of flesh and bone; an awful groan was rent from Quirk—then a quiver ran through him and he became still.

Slinker stooped, and seizing him by the shoulders dragged him to the gangway.

There was a splash in the water, a footstep on the opposite side of the boat; Slinker faced quickly about, and—murderer and detective were face to face.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END APPROACHES.

SLINKER and the detective stood face to face, the width of the deck between them, and for a minute or so neither stirred nor spoke; then it was that Slinker, in an assumed tone of offhandedness, exclaimed:

"Who be you, anyway? Don't allow anybody on board after dark, so go ashore."

"I want to see the captain of this craft," said Smith, having but little hope of being able to carry out the ruse, yet wanting to try it before resorting to brute force to capture Slinker.

"He ain't here—he's gone ashore."

"Where's the deckhand?"

"He—oh, he's all right," and Slinker retreated a step or two as Smith advanced.

"Hold up a minute, I want to speak to you," said the detective.

"Oh, you do," and Slinker nervously fingered the trigger of his revolver, and felt more than half inclined to risk the report of a shot, and had it been in his power to serve the detective as he had Quirk it would have made his heart leap with joy.

As it was, he knew full well why Smith wanted to speak to him, and knew that his only safety was in flight; so, of a sudden, he sprang into the small boat and with one shove sent her back under the guards where Smith could not see her when he rushed to the gangway.

Afraid that his game would escape him, the detective drew his revolver, and no longer concealing his mission, demanded Slinker's surrender.

"You want me?" Slinker ventured to say. "For what?"

"As a witness against young Griggs," said the detective. "There's no charge against you."

"Oh," said Slinker.

"Come out, now, and give yourself up, or I'll fire on you."

Slinker returned no answer, but, as noiselessly as possible, moved the boat along under the guard until the swell of the paddle-box hid from view the front gangway where Smith was standing; Slinker here sat down, and noiselessly running out the oars, commenced quietly pulling out into the lake.

Smith grew impatient and fired a shot toward the spot where he had last heard Slinker's voice; and hearing no reply or stir, and being attracted by a slight noise as of oars in row-locks somewhere in the neighborhood of the stern, he dragged a door aside, and running through the vessel emerged at the after gangway; his eyes pierced the gloom just sufficient to see the outlines of the boat and its rower.

He fired two shots at Slinker, and then jumped on the pier in search of a small boat.

Fortune had placed one near at hand; into it he sprang and pulled after Slinker, straining every nerve and muscle to win the race.

Straight out into the lake Slinker went, and straight as a die the detective pursued, keeping up but unable to close the gap between them.

Thus they had gone some half hour or more when far away and faint, but growing more distinct each minute, they could hear the roll and thud of a steamboat's paddles; it was the belated *Queen* coming, and after a little Smith saw her lights come in view.

He was pretty well played out, and was beginning to feel discouraged, when this occurred, giving him new energy, for he hoped in some way to get aid from her in his chase.

When near enough, or as near as she would come, Smith rose in his boat and fired three times after the fugitive; the balls, however, did no harm, but the reports accomplished their aim, for it attracted the attention of those on the *Queen*; her wheel was jammed hard down, and coming around, Huckleberry laid her directly toward the spot whence the reports proceeded; Smith at once sat down, seized the oars and pulled with all his might after Slinker, so as to keep him in sight.

The *Queen* bore down on him, and then Slinker having changed his course, Smith followed, and stopped once to fire again; instinctively Huckleberry obeyed this queer signal, and put after them; the *Queen* was making a low rate of speed, yet rapidly overhauled the two small boats, and presently Smith had to pull sharply to one side, to prevent being run down; from the pilot house Huckleberry saw the dark object on the water, and when he heard a shrill cry:

"Boat ahoy!" instantly responded;

"Who are you? What's wanted?"

"There's a murderer in the small boat. Capture him, captain; run him down."

Huckleberry recognized the voice as that of the detective, and having rang before to slow down, now rang to go ahead full speed.

Slinker had ere this vanished in the darkness, but in a few minutes he came into view off the starboard bow; at once the *Queen* was laid toward him, but when she was near by, Slinker suddenly turned at right angles and pulled rapidly away, and made some distance before the steamer could be brought around in the new direction.

Several times he did this successfully, and was about to attempt it again, when Huckleberry, surmising it, threw over the wheel, and in less than a minute there came a crash, the *Queen's* bows crushed the boat like an egg-shell, and Slinker was left struggling in the water, and would have been swept under the wheel and killed but for Jimmy's promptly answering the bell to reverse the engine.

The exciting chase was ended, and when the detective reached the spot, he made Slinker a prisoner without much trouble; Slinker made a good show of resistance, and attempted to shoot Smith, but his wet revolver refused to go off, and he was forced to give up, and being hauled on the *Queen*, was soon secured with handcuffs; the small boat was taken in tow, and not long after they reached the pier.

Smith at once lodged Slinker in jail, in one of its darkest and strongest cells, and then, returning with a number of men, set about grappling for Quirk's body, which was recovered without much difficulty, Dick Larkin having been given charge of the party, while Huckleberry accompanied Smith to Mr. Marsland's.

Mrs. Wood was sent for, and when she arrived, and all were gathered in the parlor, the detective said:

"I have here a paper I should like to read you. Some of you, including Mr. Marsland and Mrs. Wood, are partially acquainted with its contents. It was found on the body of Henry Burton, and explains itself," and then he read the manuscript, which we give somewhat abridged:

"In the year 18—, on the sixth day of December, I was sitting beside the fire in my office at the — county poorhouse, of which I was superintendent.

"It was a nasty, stormy day, and I was just congratulating myself on not being compelled to go out, when one of the attendants entered, leading a woman, pale as a ghost, and drenched to the skin, who carried a child in her arms.

"Her clothing was of fine quality, and her child was richly dressed, and I looked at them in surprise, and asked her what she wished; her reply was wild and incoherent, and I saw that she was wandering in her mind; I had no right to lodge her except upon a written order of the overseers of the poor, and so explained it to the miserable creature; she seemed only to partially understand me, and kept on begging that I would not turn her out, but to find her husband for her.

"I asked her who her husband was and where he was, but received no intelligible reply; I could not turn a dog out in such weather, and told the woman who brought her in to give her something to eat and care for her.

"The storm continued; we gave her a bed, which she was unable to leave the next morning, being weak, and, moreover, in a high fever. Everything was done for her that could be done, but she died a week after she came, during all of which time she never betrayed the least consciousness, except when we placed her baby at her breast, which she would strain to her, and seem to murmur its name, which I made out to be Woodward.

"She died and was buried at the expense of the county, but I privately marked the grave, for I

felt sure time would tell who she was. Her clothing and trinkets I took care of till several years passed, and the child, strong and lusty, was adopted by a fisherman, named Wood, from Lakeport, who divided the name by which we had always called him, and made it Ward Wood, instead of Woodward.

"I always had an idea that some time it would be worth something to know the child's whereabouts, so I kept an eye on it, and always visited the Woods when business called me to Lakeport.

"When the child was six years old, I had reason to go to Lakeport and saw it; on my way home I stopped at the county clerk's office to search the title for a deed of some property; while engaged in doing this I struck the name of Woodward.

"It being uncommon, I was attracted by it, and scanning it closely, discovered that it was attached to a deed conveying a large amount of property to one Charles Griggs, then a clerk in the bank.

"Out of curiosity I followed the matter up, and learned that this man Woodward had died at the house of Griggs on the eighth day of December, two days after the woman came to the poorhouse.

"It struck me as a singular coincidence that she had been tramping on toward Lakeport, for after her death I heard of her having been seen elsewhere. I inquired if Woodward had been married, and all I could learn was that, although a heavy property-owner in Lakeport, descended from a distant relative, he was a comparative stranger there to all but Griggs, but that he was supposed to be unmarried.

"I examined the deed again, and discovered that the record of it was faulty, that it had no witnesses; it instantly struck me as peculiar, and when I heard that Griggs had steadily refused to sell pieces of property for which he was offered far beyond their value, I made up my mind that something was wrong anyhow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT REST.

"After nearly a year's quiet work, I got hold of the slight bit of information that some one had been casually acquainted with Woodward in Syracuse.

"Thither I went, and, after much trouble, learned that such a man had lived there; he had been reported wealthy, as he did no business; he had married a poor orphan girl, without a relative in the world, and they had lived together most happily.

"In October he had left Syracuse to attend to some business, as he said, leaving his wife behind, and promising to return in two or three weeks. He came not, and his young wife grieved terribly, and it was feared her mind would break.

"Her husband had not returned when her baby was born, and this worrying fact, in connection with her illness, unsettled her mind; her money ran out, and people looked at her with suspicion, which much was comprehended by her dazed mind; for some reason she refused to say where her husband had gone, but one day, when well again, she snatched up her baby from its cradle, and fled from the house, saying she was going to her husband, and she had never been seen or heard of afterward, nor had her husband ever returned.

"Back to Lakeport I went, and learned that Woodward had arrived there in the month of October, and had been taken sick early in November; he had been nursed exclusively by Mr. and Mrs. Griggs.

"Putting two and two together, I made up my mind that the woman had been the wife of this very Woodward, and, moreover, that Griggs knew that he had been married; and reached the conclusion that the deed was a forgery, executed immediately before or after the owner's death.

"This, of course, was only theory; I had no absolute proof.

"Yet I approached Griggs on the subject, and charged him boldly with it; he was much taken aback by my charge, and half admitting its truth, offered me two thousand dollars for the trinkets in my possession, and to pay me to keep my mouth shut.

"At first I scouted the idea of being dishonest, but ruin had become my enemy ere this, and had the upper hand of me; I was also deeply in debt, and when he displayed the money, I yielded to temptation.

"As months and years slipped by, I went from bad to worse; I was discharged from my position for converting various county funds to my own use, though nothing could ever be proved against me.

"Whenever I got hard up I visited Griggs, and forced him to give me hush money.

"Once he defied me, thinking the possession of the trinkets made him safe; I visited Syracuse again, and in a church record there discovered an entry of the marriage of Woodward and the orphan girl.

"Holding this over his head, I extorted money from him whenever I ran short; when I was last at his house I had reason to think that his situation was growing desperate; the money I obtained that time was lost in one night's gambling; a week ago in a brawl I struck a man, and he fell dead as a hammer.

"I fled the place and sought refuge in the woods; this morning I entered Salstonville thoroughly disguised, and am writing this in the village hotel. I have just mailed a letter to Griggs, telling him of an intended visit.

"I shall get some more money from him and then flee the country and try to live a better life in a place where I am unknown.

"Before going, as an instance of my desire to do right, I want to make some reparation for the past, by placing this document in the hands of young Wood; I ask him to forgive me for concealing his parentage so long, and can only say in my own justification, that I should have told him this before, only I knew that he could not be robbed of his inheritance, as Griggs did not dare sell any of the property, which will be found intact."

It would be hard to say which was the most surprised of the listeners, for Smith had not hinted to either Marsland or Mrs. Wood from what exact source Huckleberry's good fortune was coming.

They were all astonished at the extent of the villainy of Charles Griggs, and that it had been kept covered so long.

Mr. Marsland was the first to congratulate Huckleberry, being followed by his wife and Maud, and then by his foster mother, Mrs. Wood, who accepted an invitation to remain all night at the Marslands; and when she went to bed she blessed Huckleberry, that he had made her again a lady, and shuddered as she thought of what she had been one short year before.

Men do wrong and reform, and people accept them again as if they had never strayed from the right path. Not so, usually, in the case of women. And knowing this, and feeling that the favor she received was on Huckleberry's account, for his sake she blessed the day when the visit to the county house resulted in bringing him to her home.

Mr. Marsland, Smith and Huckleberry—the last so overcome that he could not utter a word—left the house and went to Griggs'.

They found Bob still on guard over father and son. His face was flushed, while Levi's was bathed in blood. An explanation followed, and they learned that, manacled as he was, Levi had made a desperate attempt to escape, and had only been subdued by a well-directed blow of Bob's.

The servants of the house knew not what to make of affairs, and stole away with frightened faces, now stopping to glance into the parlor, to assure themselves that the Griggs were really prisoners, and they were not losing their senses.

And they had another reason for blanched faces and quiet steps. The servant that Smith had sent up to Mrs. Griggs no sooner saw her than she sent for the doctor, who was now beside her.

"She will die before morning," he said. "She can't live."

She lay there, quiet and calm, her pale face no longer graven with trouble, though there was a sadness left behind that told of its having been there.

"It's all over," she repeated, in a whisper now and then. "The burden is gone."

Her eyes were closed, and her breath barely came and went. At a few feet distance she looked as if dead.

They did not disturb her; it would have been criminal in that holy hour of transition from this world to the next.

She aroused herself when she heard the door close when Mr. Marsland's party arrived, and asked:

"Who came in?"

The servant departed and found out, but did tell her until she had asked a second or third time.

"Mr. Marsland and Huckleberry," the weeping girl then replied.

"Bring them here," she weakly said, "and my husband and Levi;" and she closed her eyes wearily.

Softly the party entered the room, uttering no words—so softly that she was unaware of their presence until she opened her eyes of her own accord.

Addressing herself to Huckleberry particularly, she said:

"God forgive me the wrong I have done you! Will you also forgive me?"

"Yes," said he, in a broken voice, being affected by the scene.

"Your father died beneath this roof. He came here on business, was taken sick, and I nursed him. We had always supposed him single, but the day before he died he told me of his wife. 'Give her my dying blessing,' he said. 'And the child—oh! that I could have seen it—give it my blessing, too.'"

"My husband promised to write to your mother, and it was three years or more afterward before I knew how foully he had acted.

"I learned that your mother had disappeared with her child in her arms; that my husband had forged a deed transferring the property to himself. He came to me and asked me to sign it as a witness, and told me he could never transfer or sell the property without my signature.

"Recoiling from his villainy, I swore never to do so, and I have kept my vow, and you will find it all as it was left at your father's death.

"But he was my husband, I loved him still, and I kept his secret, as he swore both mother and child were dead.

"I never learned any better until a few months ago, when I overheard my son and my husband in the study, and knew that Levi had attempted to murder you, to get you out of the way.

"The blow was heavier than I could bear, and I have slowly sunk beneath the weight of the dreadful secret. People said I had something on my mind, but oh! they little guessed how much was there.

"I overheard them say there was a record of the marriage in Syracuse, and the other proofs will be found in the safe in the study.

"Like a canker-worm have these things gnawed into my heart. Thank God! the gnawing has ceased, and I am at peace with the Judge before whom I shall soon be summoned.

"Husband, I have kept your secret, though it has killed me, until now the end has come, as I felt it must some day. Have I your forgiveness?"

"My forgiveness!" echoed Mr. Griggs, in a dazed way, and then his eyes rested sadly on the stricken figure before him. Slowly he seemed to realize all; he remembered the far-away past—remembered the bright and happy girl he had led to the altar, and remembered how happy, happy they had been, poor though they were, until he yielded to temptation, and this great black shadow had settled over their lives—remembered all, and then flung himself on the bed beside her, and, caressing her with his manacled hands, cried:

"My forgiveness! Oh, God! have I your forgiveness?"

The anguish, the repentance in the tone, told their tale, and, softened into tears, she granted it freely and fully.

"Levi," she said, "God in his mercy support you in this trial you have before you. I am dying. Will you make my last minutes on earth happy ones by sincerely repenting, and calling on Him above for mercy?"

A sullen snarl was his only reply.

"Kiss me once more," she then pleaded—"just once more, and I'll try and think the lips as pure and innocent as when I held you a baby in my lap!"

Levi bent and kissed the mother he had hurried to the grave, whose only sorrow now was for her son; she was happy in thinking of the close of her troubled life, for her faith saw happiness beyond the grave.

A sob or two shook the body of her husband, and then he became strangely quiet.

Mrs. Griggs looked slowly from one to another of those about her, and on the servants she seemed to smile the blessings her strength would not let her utter.

She closed her eyes, and the wan smile fluttered about her pale lips; no sound broke the stillness; the silence was solemn unto death.

A minute later she opened them again, and they rested on her husband, pityingly, with the old love-light in them; she raised her hand with an effort to his face, a quiet look of content crossed her face, and she whispered:

"He is gone!"

Her hand sank on the coverlet, her eyelids drooped, a transfiguring smile o'erspread her features, and she finished:

"And I am at rest!"

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

Poor woman! Her troubles were over, her soul with God.

At rest!

What a world of meaning was couched in those two words.

She was indeed at rest!

They softly approached the bed, awed by her death, and looked at her husband; the detective slipped off the handcuffs, for no longer were they needed; the guilty man had "gone!"

One by one, and in parties, they left the scene of death, and the sad duties to the dead were performed.

Levi was taken away to jail at once and lodged in a cell near Slinker's.

Two days later, handcuffed and in charge of Smith, he heard the funeral services over the bodies of his parents and saw them laid away to rest.

For the first time he seemed to break, and was taken back to jail, miserable indeed; triumphant in his villainy, the climax had come like a thunderbolt, and he was now under a charge the punishment of which was death.

He saw no use of longer concealing anything, and supplied the few missing links in the chain of his villainous career.

The fall term of court came at last, and the first case on the docket was Huckleberry's, on charge of robbing the bank.

It was a mere formality.

Then came Gadding's trial for abduction; the evidence was clear as day, and he received twenty years as his sentence.

White and trembling, Levi Griggs stepped into the docket in response to his name; the coroner's jury had viewed Burton's body and promptly gave a verdict charging Levi with his murder; and this was the charge he was to answer.

In his character was not to be found a single redeeming feature, and when asked to plead guilty or not guilty, he begged hard for mercy, that his life might be spared.

"It rests with the jury," said the judge, coolly. "Guilty or not guilty?"

Levi agreed to plead guilty and save the trouble of trying him if they would sentence him to prison for life instead of hanging him; this was accepted and he was removed.

Slinker was under indictment for the murder of Quirk.

He resolved to stand trial, and pleaded:

"Not guilty."

His character suffered a thorough overhauling during the trial, and was found as hideous and black as perfidy and evil could make it.

Youth had been a thing in Levi's favor, but it was not so in Slinker's case, and it was shown that he had urged Levi on, and had planned the various dastardly attempts on Huckleberry's life; there was not one thing to incline the jury to pity, and they returned the verdict:

"Guilty!"

His sentence, as pronounced by the judge, was to be hanged by the neck until dead.

Nought occurred to change the course of events, and on the day appointed by the judge, Slinker, bold, defiant until the last, suffered the death penalty.

Huckleberry adopted Mr. Marsland's advice, and the day following the burial of Mr. and Mrs. Griggs, he put his case in the hands of a lawyer.

No one came forward to dispute his claim, which was proved to the satisfaction of everybody, and in less than a week he had entered into possession.

During this time, Dick and Jemmy, with the aid of Ben Ruggles, had run the *Queen*, whose condenser was put in order on that eventful night by mechanics brought with them from Railroadville.

The *Antelope* laid at her pier, tied up by order of the officers of the law, and she was not released until, with all the household and personal effects of Charles Griggs, it was made over to him as partial indemnity for the money Griggs had found on his father's person at the time of his death, and accrued interest on the forced loan.

Huckleberry now found his hands so full that he at once saw that he must give up his loved work of standing in the pilot-house and handling the wheel of the *Queen*.

So one night, when all had been settled, he invited Dick and Jemmy to visit him.

"Got a dollar, Jemmy?" he said.

"Yes."

"Give it to me; and you, Dick?"

"Here it is," and the wondering Dick handed Huckleberry a dollar, and looked questioningly at him.

"Now," said Huckleberry, "Jemmy, just sign your name here at the foot of this paper, will you?"

Wondering what it all meant, Jemmy did as requested, and Dick followed his example, after which Mr. Marsland stepped up, and right after the word—"Witness," wrote his name, and then retired.

"Now read it," said Huckleberry, tears of joy in his eyes.

Jemmy and Dick were both poor scholars, but they managed to make out that the payment of two dollars and the signing of their names made them joint owners of the *Lake Queen*.

It would have done your heart good to see them.

Jemmy shook hands with Huckleberry as if he would never leave off, and Dick, attempting to give three cheers, had got half way through the first *hip* when his voice gave out, and it was ended with a croak that sounded suspiciously like a frog in his throat.

Ben Ruggles was not forgotten, either, and when Huckleberry put the *Antelope* on another route so as not to conflict with the *Queen*, he made him her captain.

Huckleberry worked harder than ever during the next few months to get things straight, at the same time resuming his studies under competent instructors.

He was as happy as the day was long, and never a shadow crossed his brow, except when he thought of his poor mother, and pictured her struggling along the wintry roads with himself in her arms, and then imagined the scene of her death surrounded by the squalidness of a poor-house.

He was a regular visitor at the Marslands' now, and the foregone conclusion of what the young folks were about never bothered Mr. Marsland in the least.

He had never had but one objection to the brave fellow, his unknown origin, and that was now swept away.

Huckleberry became a name of the past, and he is now known as Ward Woodward.

It is almost needless to say that he and Maud were married.

Just as the ceremony was about to commence, Dick Larkin, who had been detained, rushed hastily in, and seeing that he was in time, touched his forelock and gave the old time cry of:

"ON DECK!"

[THE END.]

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